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AMAZING STORIES Fact and Science Fiction

VOL. 37 NO. 10

Amazing

Fact and Science Fiction

stories

OCTOBER

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10

DRUNKBOAT

by Cordwainer Smith

SF Profile:

EDMOND HAMILTON



In October

FANTASTIC

SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL, BUT HER BEAUTY SPELLED DISASTER

*Against the ochre sands of an empty Mars, the mad girl slowly walked through the garish cardboard mazes. Her beauty was as compelling as the death-dealing jeweled insects she harbored. There, in a world outside of time, she and the man who loved and hated her, spun out the macabre finish to their silent duel. Don't miss **THE SCREEN GAME**.*



IN THE SAME ISSUE:

*Suppose you were the last worshipper of a witch. When you died, she would die. Wouldn't you be willing to spend . . . **A NIGHT WITH HECATE?***

*Follow the murky pathway to the unknown in October **Fantastic**. On Sale September 24th.*

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EDITORIAL

DUE to the inflexible schedules of printing and publishing, these words—being written in July—will not be read until September. But no amount of elapsed time will dim our regret at the death, in late June, of the dean of science-fiction artists, Frank R. Paul. Paul created the very first cover illustration for *AMAZING STORIES*, and continued to be active in the field until his last days. May he be at peace where he is now, Out There.

* * *

SCIENCE-FICTION has a new, if slightly juvenile, feather in its cap. This year's winner of the National Spelling Bee (first prize: \$1,000), was 13-year-old Glen van Slyke 2d, who attributed his success to his omnivorous reading of sf, where he learned how to spell many of the difficult words he was challenged with. Fittingly enough, Glen lives with his family in Oak Ridge, Tenn. We would have wished that Glen's championship word had been something like "telemetry" or "psionics." But the words that gained him

the crown were "bilioousness" and "equipage," a likely combination for any of us who get motion-sick on horseback.

* * *

THERE is a saying among jaundiced book editors and publishers that, if there is anything that sells better than books about Abraham Lincoln, it is books about doctors. And, if there is anything that sells better than *that*, it is books about dogs. Some years ago a writer fellow actually produced a book about Lincoln's doctor, and it was a fair success. The pundits waited for some other writer to come up with a book about Lincoln's doctor's dog, but this is evidently still in someone's typewriter. All of which is by way of preface to noting the recent publication of Groff Conklin's latest science-fiction anthology, *Great Science Fiction About Doctors*. Suggestion for Judy Merrill: How about *Great Science Fiction About Dogs*? Or, if we wish to go Cliff Simak's canine evolution one better, how about *Great Science Fiction About Dog Doctors*?—NL



DRUNKBOAT

By CORDWAINER SMITH

Illustrated by BIRMINGHAM

*To follow Elizabeth he went where no man
had ever gone before.
He left light itself behind like a shrivelled leaf.
Space itself curled up behind him.*

PERHAPS it is the saddest, maddest, wildest story in the whole long history of space. It is true that no one else had ever done anything like it before, to travel at such a distance, and at such speeds, and by such means. The hero looked like such an ordinary man—when people looked at him for the first time. The sec-

ond time, ah! that was different.

And the heroine. Small she was, and ash-blonde, intelligent, perky, and hurt. Hurt—yes, that's the right word. She looked as though she needed comforting or helping, even when she was perfectly all right. Men felt more like men when she was near. Her name was Elizabeth.



Who would have thought that her name would ring loud and clear in the wild vomiting nothing which made up space?

He took an old, old rocket, of an ancient design. With it he outflew, outfled, outjumped all the machines which had ever existed before. You might almost think that he went so fast that he shocked the great vaults of the sky, so that the ancient poem might have been written for him alone. "All the stars threw down their spears and watered heaven with their tears."

Go he did, so fast, so far that people simply did not believe it at first. They thought it was a joke told by men, a farce spun forth by rumor, a wild story to while away the summer afternoon.

We know his name now.

And our children and their children will know it for always.

Rambo. Artyr Rambo of Earth Four.

But he followed his Elizabeth where no space was. He went where men could not go, had not been, did not dare, would not think.

He did all this of his own free will.

Of course people thought it was a joke at first, and got to making up silly songs about the reported trip.

"Dig me a hole for that reeling feeling . . .!" sang one.

"Push me the call for the um-

ber number . . .!" sang another.

"Where is the ship of the ochre joker . . .?" sang a third.

Then people everywhere found it was true. Some stood stock still and got gooseflesh. Others turned quickly to everyday things. Space₂ had been found, and it had been pierced. Their world would never be the same again. The solid rock had become an open door.

Space itself, so clean, so empty, so tidy, now looked like a million million light-years of tapioca pudding—gummy, mushy, sticky, not fit to breathe, not fit to swim in.

How did it happen?

Everybody took the credit, each in his own different way.

1

"He came for me," said Elizabeth. "I died and he came for me because the machines were making a mess of my life when they tried to heal my terrible, useless death."

2

"I went myself," said Rambo. "They tricked me and lied to me and fooled me, but I took the boat and I became the boat and I got there. Nobody made me do it. I was angry, but I went. And I came back, didn't I?"

He too was right, even when he

twisted and whined on the green grass of earth, his ship lost in a space so terribly far and strange that it might have been beneath his living hand, or might have been half a galaxy away.

How can anybody tell, with space-three?

It was Rambo who got back, looking for his Elizabeth. He loved her. So the trip was his, and the credit his.

3

BUT the Lord Crudelta said, many years later, when he spoke in a soft voice and talked confidentially among friends, "The experiment was mine. I designed it. I picked Rambo. I drove the selectors mad, trying to find a man who would meet those specifications. And I had that rocket built to the old, old plans. It was the sort of thing which human beings first used when they jumped out of the air a little bit, leaping like flying fish from one wave to the next and already thinking that they were eagles. If I had used one of the regular planoform ships, it would have disappeared with a sort of reverse gurgle, leaving space milky for a little bit while it faded into nastiness and obliteration. But I did not risk that. I put the rocket on a launching pad. *And the launching pad itself was an interstellar ship!* Since we were us-

ing an ancient rocket, we did it up right, with the old, old writing, mysterious letters printed all over the machine. We even had the name of our Organization—I and O and M—for 'the Instrumentality of Mankind' written on it good and sharp.

"How would I know," went on the Lord Crudelta, "that we would succeed more than we wanted to succeed, that Rambo would tear space itself loose from its hinges and leave that ship behind, just because he loved Elizabeth so sharply much, so fiercely much?"

Crudelta sighed.

"I know it and I don't know it. I'm like that ancient man who tried to take a water boat the wrong way around the planet Earth and found a new world instead. Columbus, he was called. And the land, that was Australia or America or something like that. That's what I did. I sent Rambo out in that ancient rocket and he found a way through space. Now none of us will ever know who might come bulking through the floor or take shape out of the air in front of us."

Crudelta added, almost wistfully: "What's the use of telling the story? Everybody knows it, anyhow. My part in it isn't very glorious. Now the end of it, that's pretty. The bungalow by the waterfall and all the wonderful children that other people

gave to them, you could write a poem about that. But the next to the end, how he showed up at the hospital helpless and insane, looking for his own Elizabeth. That was sad and eerie, that was frightening. I'm glad it all came to the happy ending with the bungalow by the waterfall, but it took a crashing long time to get there. And there are parts of it that we will never quite understand, the naked skin against naked space, the eyeballs riding something much faster than light ever was. Do you know what an *aoudad* is? It's an ancient sheep that used to live on Old Earth, and here we are, thousands of years later, with a children's nonsense rhyme about it. The animals are gone but the rhyme remains. It'll be like that with Rambo someday. Everybody will know his name and all about his drunkboat, but they will forget the scientific milestone that he crossed, hunting for Elizabeth in an ancient rocket that couldn't fly from peettle to pootle. . . . Oh, the rhyme? Don't you know that? It's a silly thing. It goes,

Point your gun at a murky
lurky.

*(Now you're talking ham or
turkey!)*

Shoot a shot at a dying 'aoudad.

*(Don't ask the lady why or
how, dad!)*

Don't ask me what 'ham' and 'turkey' are. Probably parts of ancient animals, like beefsteak or sirloin. But the children still say the words. They'll do that with Rambo and his drunken boat some day. They may even tell the story of Elizabeth. But they will never tell the part about how he got to the hospital. That part is too terrible, too real, too sad and wonderful at the end. They found him on the grass. Mind you, naked on the grass, and nobody knew where he had come from!"

4

THEY found him naked on the grass and nobody knew where he had come from. They did not even know about the ancient rocket which the Lord Crudelta had sent beyond the end of nowhere with the letters I, O and M written on it. They did not know that this was Rambo, who had gone through space-three. The robots noticed him first and brought him in, photographing everything that they did. They had been programmed that way, to make sure that anything unusual was kept in the records.

Then the nurses found him in an outside room.

They assumed that he was alive, since he was not dead, but they could not prove that he was alive, either.

That heightened the puzzle.

The doctors were called in. Real doctors, not machines. They were very important men. Citizen Doctor Timofeyev, Citizen Doctor Grosbeck and the director himself, Sir and Doctor Vomact. They took the case.

(Over on the other side of the hospital Elizabeth waited, unconscious, and nobody knew it at all. Elizabeth, for whom he had jumped space, and pierced the stars, but nobody knew it yet!)

The young man could not speak. When they ran eye-prints and fingerprints through the Population Machine, they found that he had been bred on earth itself, but had been shipped out as a frozen and unborn baby to Earth Four. At tremendous cost, they queried Earth Four with an "instant message," only to discover that the young man who lay before them in the hospital had been lost from an experimental ship on an intergalactic trip.

Lost.

No ship and no sign of ship. And here he was.

They stood at the edge of space, and did not know what they were looking at. They were doctors and it was their business to repair or rebuild people, not to ship them around. How should such men know about space, when they did not even know

about space, except for the fact that people got on the planoform ships and made trips through it? They were looking for sickness when their eyes saw engineering. They treated him when he was well.

All he needed was time, to get over the shock of the most tremendous trip ever made by a human being, but the doctors did not know that and they tried to rush his recovery.

WHEN they put clothes on him, he moved from coma to a kind of mechanical spasm and tore the clothing off. Once again stripped, he lay himself roughly on the floor and refused food or speech.

They fed him with needles while the whole energy of space, had they only known it, was radiating out of his body in new forms.

They put him all by himself in a locked room and watched him through the peephole.

He was a nice-looking young man, even though his mind was blank and his body was rigid and unconscious. His hair was very fair and his eyes were light blue but his face showed character—a square chin; a handsome, resolute sullen mouth; old lines in the face which looked as though, when conscious, he must have lived many days or months on the edge of rage.

When they studied him the third day in the hospital, their patient had not changed at all.

He had torn off his pajamas again and lay naked, face down, on the floor.

His body was as immobile and tense as it had been on the day before.

(One year later, this room was going to be a museum with a bronze sign reading, "Here lay Rambo after he left the Old Rocket for Space Three," but the doctors still had no idea of what they were dealing with.)

His face was turned so sharply to the left that the neck muscles showed. His right arm stuck out straight from the body. The left arm formed an exact right angle from the body, with the left forearm and hand pointing rigidly upward at 90° from the upper arm. The legs were in the grotesque parody of a running position.

Doctor Grosbeck said, "It looks to me like he's swimming. Let's drop him in a tank of water and see if he moves." Grosbeck sometimes went in for drastic solutions to problems.

Timofeyev took his place at the peephole. "Spasm, still," he murmured. "I hope the poor fellow is not feeling pain when his cortical defenses are down. How can a man fight pain if he does not even know what he is experiencing?"

"And you, sir and doctor," said Grosbeck to Vomact, "what do you see?"

Vomact did not need to look. He had come early and had looked long and quietly at the patient through the peephole before the other doctors arrived. Vomact was a wise man, with good insight and rich intuitions. He could guess in an hour more than a machine could diagnose in a year; he was already beginning to understand that this was a sickness which no man had ever had before. Still, there were remedies waiting.

The three doctors tried them.

They tried hypnosis, electrotherapy, massage, subsonics, atropine, surgital, a whole family of the digitalinids, and some quasi-narcotic viruses which had been grown in orbit where they mutated fast. They got the beginning of a response when they tried gas hypnosis combined with an electronically amplified telepath; this showed that something still went on inside the patient's mind. Otherwise the brain might have seemed to be mere fatty tissue, without a nerve in it. The other attempts had shown nothing. The gas showed a faint stirring away from fear and pain. The telepath reported glimpses of unknown skies. (The doctors turned the telepath over to the Space Police promptly, so they could try to

code the star patterns which he had seen in a patient's mind, but the patterns did not fit. The telepath, though a keen-witted man, could not remember them in enough detail for them to be scanned against the samples of piloting sheets.)

The doctors went back to their drugs and tried ancient, simple remedies—morphine and caffeine to counteract each other, and a rough massage to make him dream again, so that the telepath could pick it up.

There was no further result that day, or the next.

Meanwhile the Earth authorities were getting restless. They thought, quite rightly, that the hospital had done a good job of proving that the patient had not been on Earth until a few moments before the robots found him on the grass. How had he gotten on the grass?

The airspace of earth reported no intrusion at all, no vehicle marking a blazing arc of air incandescing against metal, no whisper of the great forces which drove a planoform ship through space.

(Crudelta, using faster-than-light ships, was creeping slow as a snail back toward Earth, racing his best to see if Rambo had gotten there first.)

On the fifth day, there was the beginning of a breakthrough.

Elizabeth had passed.

This was found out only much later, by a careful check of the hospital records.

The doctors only knew this much:

Patients had been moved down the corridor, sheet-covered figures immobile on wheeled beds.

Suddenly the beds stopped rolling.

A nurse screamed.

The heavy steel-and-plastic wall was bending inward. Some slow, silent force was pushing the wall into the corridor itself.

The wall ripped.

A human hand emerged.

One of the quick-witted nurses screamed,

"Push those beds! Push them out of the way."

The nurses and robots obeyed.

The beds rocked like a group of boats crossing a wave when they came to the place where the floor, bonded to the wall, had bent upward to meet the wall as it tore inward. The peach-colored glow of the lights flicked. Robots appeared.

A second human hand came through the wall. Pushing in opposite directions, the hands tore the wall as though it had been wet paper.

The patient from the grass put his head through.

He looked blindly up and down the corridor, his eyes not quite focussing, his skin glowing a strange red-brown from the burns of open space.

"No," he said. Just that one word.

But that "No" was heard. Though the volume was not loud, it carried throughout the hospital. The internal telecommunications system relayed it. Every switch in the place went negative. Frantic nurses and robots, with even the doctors helping them, rushed to turn all the machines back on—the pumps, the ventilators, the artificial kidneys, the brain re-recorders, even the simple air engines which kept the atmosphere clean.

Far overhead an aircraft spun giddily. Its "off" switch, surrounded by triple safeguards, had suddenly been thrown into the negative position. Fortunately the robot-pilot got it going again before crashing into earth.

The patient did not seem to know that his word had this effect.

(Later the world knew that this was part of the "drunkboat effect." The man himself had developed the capacity for using his neuropsychical system as a machine control.)

In the corridor, the machine robot who served as policeman arrived. He wore sterile, padded

velvet gloves with a grip of sixty metric tons inside his hands. He approached the patient. The robot had been carefully training to recognize all kinds of danger from delirious or psychotic humans; later he reported that he had an input of "danger, extreme" on every band of sensation. He had been expecting to seize the prisoner with irreversible firmness and to return him to his bed, but with this kind of danger sizzling in the air, the robot took no chances. His wrist itself contained a hypodermic pistol which operated on compressed argon.

He reached out toward the unknown, naked man who stood in the big torn gap of the wall. The wrist-weapon hissed and a sizeable injection of condamine, the most powerful narcotic in the known universe, spat its way through the skin of Rambo's neck. The patient collapsed.

The robot picked him up gently and tenderly, lifted him through the torn wall, pushed the door open with a kick which broke the lock and put the patient back on his bed. The robot could hear doctors coming, so he used his enormous hands to pat the steel wall back into its proper shape. Work-robots or underpeople could finish the job later, but meanwhile it looked better to have that part of the building set at right angles again.

Doctor Vomact arrived, followed closely by Grosbeck.

"What happened?" he yelled, shaken out of a life-long calm. The robot pointed at the ripped wall.

"He tore it open. I put it back," said the robot.

The doctors turned to look at the patient. He had crawled off his bed again and was on the floor, but his breathing was light and natural.

"What did you give him?" cried Vomact to the robot.

"Condamine," said the robot, "according to rule 47-B. The drug is not to be mentioned outside the hospital."

"I know that," said Vomact absent-mindedly and a little crossly. "You can go along now. Thank you."

"It is not usual to thank robots," said the robot, "but you can read a commendation into my record if you want to."

"Get the blazes out of here!" shouted Vomact at the officious robot.

The robot blinked. "There are no blazes but I have the impression you mean me. I shall leave, with your permission." He jumped with odd gracefulness around the two doctors, fingered the broken doorlock absentmindedly, as though he might have wished to repair it and then, seeing Vomact glare at him, left the room completely.

A MOMENT later soft muted thuds began. Both doctors listened a moment and then gave up. The robot was out in the corridor, gently patting the steel floor back into shape. He was a tidy robot, probably animated by an amplified chicken-brain, and when he got tidy he became obstinate.

"Two questions, Gosbeck," said the sir and doctor Vomact.

"Your service, sir!"

"Where was the patient standing when he pushed the wall into the corridor, and how did he get the leverage to do it?"

Grosbeck narrowed his eyes in puzzlement. "Now that you mention it, I have no idea of how he did it. In fact, he could not have done it. But he has. And the other question?"

"What do you think of condemnation?"

"Dangerous, of course, as always. Addiction can—"

"Can you have addiction with no cortical activity?" interrupted Vomact.

"Of course," said Grosbeck promptly. "Tissue addiction."

"Look for it, then," said Vomact.

Grosbeck knelt beside the patient and felt with his fingertips for the muscle endings. He felt where they knotted themselves into the base of the skull, the tips of the shoulders, the striped area of the back.

When he stood up there was a look of puzzlement on his face. "I never felt a human body like this one before. I am not even sure that it is human any longer."

Vomact said nothing. The two doctors confronted one another. Grosbeck fidgeted under the calm stare of the senior man. Finally he blurted out,

"Sir and Doctor, I know what we *could* do."

"And that," said Vomact levelly, without the faintest hint of encouragement or of warning, "is what?"

"It wouldn't be the first time that it's been done in a hospital."

"What?" said Vomact, his eyes—those dreaded eyes!—making Grosbeck say what he did not want to say.

Grosbeck flushed. He leaned toward Vomact so as to whisper, even though there was no one standing near them. His words, when they came, had the hasty indecency of a lover's improper suggestion,

"Kill the patient, Sir and Doctor. Kill him. We have plenty of records of him. We can get a cadaver out of the basement and make it into a good simulacrum. Who knows what we will turn loose among mankind if we let him get well?"

"Who knows?" said Vomact without tone or quality to his voice. "But citizen and doctor,

what is the twelfth duty of a physician?"

"Not to take the law into his own hands, keeping healing for the healers and giving to the state or the Instrumentality whatever properly belongs to the state or the Instrumentality." Gosbeck sighed as he retracted his own suggestion. "Sir and doctor, I take it back. It wasn't medicine which I was talking about. It was government and politics which were really in my mind."

"And now . . . ?" asked Vomact.

"Heal him, or let him be until he heals himself."

"And which would you do?"

"I'd try to heal him."

"How?" said Vomact.

"Sir and doctor," cried Grosbeck, "do not ride my weaknesses in this case! I know that you like me because I am a bold, confident sort of man. Do not ask me to be myself when we do not even know where this body came from. If I were bold as usual, I would give him typhoid and condamine, stationing telepaths nearby. But this is something new in the history of man. We are people and perhaps he is not a person any more. Perhaps he represents the combination of people with some kind of a new force. How did he get here from the far side of nowhere? How many million times has he been

enlarged or reduced? We do not know what he is or what has happened to him. How can we treat a man when we are treating the cold of space, the heat of suns, the frigidity of distance? We know what to do with flesh, but this is not quite flesh any more. Feel him yourself, sir and doctor! You will touch something which nobody has ever touched before."

"I have," Vomact declared, "already felt him. You are right. We will try typhoid and condamine for half a day. Twelve hours from now let us meet each other at this place. I will tell the nurses and the robots what to do in the interim."

They both gave the red-tanned spread-eagled figure on the floor a parting glance. Grosbeck looked at the body with something like distaste mingled with fear; Vomact was expressionless, save for a wry wan smile of pity.

At the door the head nurse awaited them. Grosbeck was surprised at his chief's orders.

"Ma'am and nurse, do you have a weapon-proof vault in this hospital?"

"Yes, sir," she said. "We used to keep our records in it until we telemetered all our records into Computer Orbit. Now it is dirty and empty."

"Clean it out. Run a ventilator tube into it. Who is your military protector?"

"My what?" she cried, in surprise.

"Everyone on Earth has military protection. Where are the forces, the soldiers, who protect this hospital of yours?"

"My sir and doctor!" she called out, "my sir and doctor! I'm an old woman and I have been allowed to work here for three hundred years. But I never thought of that idea before. Why would I need soldiers?"

"Find who they are and ask them to stand by. They are specialists too, with a different kind of art from ours. Let them stand by. They may be needed before this day is out. Give my name as authority to their lieutenant or sergeant. Now here is the medication which I want you to apply to this patient."

Her eyes widened as he went on talking, but she was a disciplined woman and she nodded as she heard him out, point by point. Her eyes looked very sad and weary at the end but she was a trained expert herself and she had enormous respect for the skill and wisdom of the Sir and Doctor Vomact. She also had a warm, feminine pity for the motionless young male figure on the floor, swimming forever on the heavy floor, swimming between archipelagoes which no man living had ever dreamed before.

CRISIS came that night.

The patient had worn hand-prints into the inner wall of the vault, but he had not escaped.

The soldiers, looking oddly alert with their weapons gleaming in the bright corridor of the hospital, were really very bored, as soldiers always become when they are on duty with no action.

Their lieutenant was keyed up. The wirepoint in his hand buzzed like a dangerous insect. Sir and Doctor Vomact, who knew more about weapons than the soldiers thought he knew, saw that the wirepoint was set to HIGH, with a capacity of paralyzing people five stories up, five stories down or a kilometer sideways. He said nothing. He merely thanked the lieutenant and entered the vault, closely followed by Grosbeck and Timofeyev.

The patient swam here too.

He had changed to an arm-over-arm motion, kicking his legs against the floor. It was as though he had swum on the other floor with the sole purpose of staying afloat, and had now discovered some direction in which to go, albeit very slowly. His motions were deliberate, tense, rigid, and so reduced in time that it seemed as though he hardly moved at all. The

ripped pajamas lay on the floor beside him.

Vomact glanced around, wondering what forces the man could have used to make those hand-prints on the steel wall. He remembered Grosbeck's warning that the patient should die, rather than subject all mankind to new and unthought risks, but though he shared the feeling, he could not condone the recommendation.

Almost irritably, the great doctor thought to himself—where could the man be going?

(To Elizabeth, the truth was, to Elizabeth, now only sixty meters away. Not till much later did people understand what Rambo had been trying to do—crossing sixty mere meters to reach his Elizabeth when he had already jumped an un-count of light-years to return to her. To his own, his dear, his well-beloved who needed him!)

The condamine did not leave its characteristic mark of deep lassitude and glowing skin: perhaps the typhoid was successfully contradicting it. Rambo did seem more lively than before. The name had come through on the regular message system, but it still did not mean anything to the Sir and Doctor Vomact. It would. It would.

Meanwhile the other two doctors, briefed ahead of time, got busy with the apparatus which

the robots and the nurses had installed.

Vomact murmured to the others, "I think he's better off. Looser all around. I'll try shouting."

So busy were they that they just nodded.

Vomact screamed at the patient, "Who are you? What are you? Where do you come from?"

The sad blue eyes of the man on the floor glanced at him with a surprisingly quick glance, but there was no other real sign of communication. The limbs kept up their swim against the rough concrete floor of the vault. Two of the bandages which the hospital staff had put on him had worn off again. The right knee, scraped and bruised, deposited a sixty-centimeter trail of blood—some old and black and coagulated, some fresh, new and liquid—on the floor as it moved back and forth.

Vomact stood up and spoke to Grosbeck and Timofeyev. "Now," he said, "let us see what happens when we apply the pain."

The two stepped back without being told to do so.

Timofeyev waved his hand at a small white-enamelled orderly-robot who stood in the doorway.

The pain net, a fragile cage of wires, dropped down from the ceiling.

It was Vomact's duty, as senior doctor, to take the greatest risk. The patient was wholly en-

cased by the net of wires, but Vomact dropped to his hands and knees, lifted the net at one corner with his right hand, thrust his own head into it next to the head of the patient. Doctor Vomact's robe trailed on the clean concrete, touching the black old stains of blood left from the patient's "swim" throughout the night.

Now Vomact's mouth was centimeters from the patient's ear.

Said Vomact, "Oh."

The net hummed.

The patient stopped his slow motion, arched his back, looked steadfastly at the doctor.

Doctors Grosbeck and Timofeyev could see Vomact's face go white with the impact of the pain machine, but Vomact kept his voice under control and said evenly and loudly to the patient.

"Who—are—you?"

The patient said flatly, "Elizabeth."

The answer was foolish but the tone was rational.

Vomact pulled his head out from under the net, shouting again at the patient, "Who—are—you?"

The naked man replied, speaking very clearly:

"Chwinkle, chwinkle, little chweeble,

I am feeling very feeble!"

Vomact frowned and murmured to the robot, "More pain. Turn it up to pain ultimate."

The body thrashed under the net, trying to resume its swim on the concrete.

A loud wild braying cry came from the victim under the net. It sounded like a screamed distortion of the name Elizabeth, echoing out from endless remoteness.

It did not make sense.

Vomact screamed back, "*Who—are—you?*"

WITH unexpected clarity and resonance, the voice came back to the three doctors from the twisting body under the net of pain:

"I'm the shipped man, the ripped man, the gypped man, the dipped man, the hippled man, the tripped man, the tipped man, the slipped man, the flipped man, the nipped man, the ripped man, the clipped man—aah!" His voice choked off with a cry and he went back to swimming on the floor, despite the intensity of the pain net immediately above him.

The doctor lifted his hand. The pain net stopped buzzing and lifted high into the air.

He felt the patient's pulse. It was quick. He lifted an eyelid. The reactions were much closer to normal.

"Stand back," he said to the others.

"Pain on both of us," he said to the robot.

The net came down on the two of them.

"*Who are you?*" shrieked Vomact, right into the patient's ear, holding the man halfway off the floor and not quite knowing whether the body which tore steel walls might not, somehow, tear both of them apart as they stood.

The man babbled back at him: "I'm the most man, the post man, the host man, the ghost man, the coast man, the boast man, the dosed man, the grossed man, the toast man, the roast man, no! no! no!"

He struggled in Vomact's arms. Grosbeck and Timofeyev stepped forward to rescue their chief when the patient added, very calmly and clearly,

"Your procedure is all right, doctor, whoever you are. More fever, please. More pain, please. Some of that dope to fight the pain. You're pulling me back. I know I am on Earth. Elizabeth is near. For the love of God, get me Elizabeth! But don't rush me. I need days and days to get well."

The rationality was so startling that Grosbeck, without waiting for orders from Vomact, as chief doctor, ordered the pain net lifted.

The patient began babbling again: "I'm the three man, the he man, the tree man, the me man, the three man, the three man. . . ." His voice faded and he slumped unconscious.

Vomact walked out of the vault. He was a little unsteady.

His colleagues took him by the elbows.

He smiled wanly at them: "I wish it were lawful. . . . I could use some of that condamine myself. No wonder the pain nets wake the patients up and even make dead people do twitches! Get me some liquor. My heart is old."

Grosbeck sat him down while Timofeyev ran down the corridor in search of medicinal liquor.

Vomact murmured, "How are we going to find *his* Elizabeth? There must be millions of them. And he's from Earth Four too."

"Sir and doctor, you have worked wonders," said Grosbeck. "To go under the net. To take those chances. To bring him to speech. I will never see anything like it again. It's enough for any one lifetime, to have seen this day."

"But what do we do next?" asked Vomact wearily, almost in confusion.

That particular question needed no answer.

7

THE Lord Crudelta had reached Earth.

His pilot landed the craft and fainted at the controls with sheer exhaustion.

Of the escort cats, who had ridden alongside the space craft in the miniature space-ships, three were dead, one was coma-

tose and the fourth was spitting and raving.

When the port authorities tried to slow the Lord Crudelta down to ascertain his authority, he invoked Top Emergency, took over the command of troops in the name of the Instrumentality, arrested everyone in sight but the troop commander, and requisitioned the troop commander to take him to the hospital. The computers at the port had told him that one Rambo, "sans origine," had arrived mysteriously on the grass of a designated hospital.

Outside the hospital, the Lord Crudelta invoked Top Emergency again, placed all armed men under his own command, ordered a recording monitor to cover all his actions if he should later be channeled into a court-martial, and arrested everyone in sight.

The tramp of heavily armed men, marching in combat order, overtook Timofeyev as he hurried back to Vomact with a drink. The men were jogging along on the double. All of them had live helmets and their wirepoints were buzzing.

Nurses ran forward to drive the intruders out, ran backward when the sting of the stun-rays brushed cruelly over them. The whole hospital was in an uproar.

The Lord Crudelta later admitted that he had made a serious mistake.

The Two Minutes' War broke out immediately.

You have to understand the pattern of the Instrumentality to see how it happened. The Instrumentality was a self-perpetuating body of men with enormous powers and a strict code. Each was a plenum of the low, the middle and the high justice. Each could do anything he found necessary or proper to maintain the Instrumentality and to keep the peace between the worlds. But if he made a mistake or committed a wrong—ah, then, it was suddenly different. Any Lord could put another Lord to death in an emergency, but he was assured of death and disgrace himself if he assumed this responsibility. The only difference between ratification and repudiation came in the fact that Lords who killed in an emergency and were proved wrong were marked down on a very shameful list, while those who killed other Lords rightly (as later examination might prove) were listed on a very honorable list, but still killed.

With three Lords, the situation was different. Three lords made an emergency court; if they acted together, acted in good faith, and reported to the computers of the Instrumentality, they were exempt from punishment, though not from blame or even reduction to citizen stat-

us. Seven Lords, or all the Lords on a given planet at a given moment, were beyond any criticism except that of a dignified reversal of their actions should a later ruling prove them wrong.

This was all the business of the Instrumentality. The Instrumentality had the perpetual slogan: "Watch, but do not govern; stop war but do not wage it; protect, but do not control; and first, survive!"

The Lord Crudelta had seized the troops—not his troops, but the light regular troops of Manhome Government—because he feared that the greatest danger in the history of man might come from the person whom he himself had sent through Space.

He never expected that the troops would be plucked out from his command—an overriding power reinforced by robotic telepathy and the incomparable communications net, both open and secret, reinforced by thousands of years in trickery, defeat, secrecy, victory, and sheer experience, which the Instrumentality had perfected since it emerged from the Ancient Wars.

Overriding, overridden!

These were the commands which the Instrumentality had used before recorded time began. Sometimes they suspended their antagonists on points of law, sometimes by the deft and deadly insertion of weapons,

most often by cutting in on other peoples' mechanical and social controls and doing their will, only to drop the controls as suddenly as they had taken them.

But not Crudelta's hastily-called troops.

8

THE war broke out with a change of pace.

Two squads of men were moving into that part of the hospital where Elizabeth lay, waiting the endless returns to the jelly-baths which would rebuild her poor ruined body.

The squads changed pace.

The survivors could not account for what happened.

They all admitted to great mental confusion—afterward.

At the time it seemed that they had received a clear, logical command to turn and to defend the women's section by conerattacking their own main battalion right in their rear.

The hospital was a very strong building. Otherwise it would have melted to the ground or shot up in flame.

The leading soldiers suddenly turned around, dropped for cover and blazed their wirepoints at the comrades who followed them. The wirepoints were cued to organic material, though fairly harmless to inorganic. They were powered by the power re-

lays which every soldier wore on his back.

In the first ten seconds of the turnaround, twenty-seven soldiers, two nurses, three patients and one orderly were killed. One hundred and nine other people were wounded in that first exchange of fire.

The troop commander had never seen battle, but he had been well trained. He immediately deployed his reserves around the external exits of the building and sent his favorite squad, commanded by a Sergeant Lansdale whom he trusted well, down into the basement, so that it could rise vertically from the basement into the women's quarters and find out who the enemy was.

As yet, he had no idea that it was his own leading troops turning and fighting their comrades.

He testified later, at the trial, that he personally had no sensations of eerie interference with his own mind. He merely knew that his men had unexpectedly come upon armed resistance from antagonists—identity unknown!—who had weapons identical with theirs. Since the Lord Crudelta had brought them along in case there might be a fight with unspecified antagonists, he felt right in assuming that a Lord of the Instrumentality knew what he was doing. This was the enemy all right.

In less than a minute, the two sides had balanced out. The line of fire had moved right into his own force. The lead men, some of whom were wounded, simply turned around and began defending themselves against the men immediately behind them. It was as though an invisible line, moving rapidly, had parted the two sections of the military force.

The oily black smoke of dissolving bodies began to glut the ventilators.

Patients were screaming, doctors cursing, robots stamping around and nurses trying to call each other.

The war ended when the troop commander saw Sergeant Lansdale, whom he himself had sent upstairs, leading a charge out of the women's quarters—directly at his own commander!

The officer kept his head.

He dropped to the floor and rolled sidewise as the air chattered at him, the emanations of Lansdale's wirepoint killing all the tiny bacteria in the air. On his helmet phone he pushed the manual controls to TOP VOLUME and to NONCOMS ONLY and he commanded, with a sudden flash of brilliant mother-wit,

"Good job, Lansdale!"

Lansdale's voice came back as weak as if it had been off-planet, "We'll keep them out of this section yet, sir!"

THE troop commander called back very loudly but calmly, not letting on that he thought his sergeant was psychotic.

"Easy now. Hold on. I'll be with you."

He changed to the other channel and said to his nearby men, "Cease fire. Take cover and wait."

A wild scream came to him from the phones.

It was Lansdale. "Sir! Sir! I'm fighting *you*, sir. I just caught on. It's getting me again. Watch out."

The buzz and burr of the weapons suddenly stopped.

The wild human uproar of the hospital continued.

A tall doctor, with the insignia of high seniority, came gently to the troop commander and said,

"You can stand up and take your soldiers out now, young fellow. The fight was a mistake."

"I'm not under your orders," snapped the young officer. "I'm under the Lord Crudelta. He requisitioned this force from the Manhome Government. Who are you?"

"You may salute me, captain," said the doctor, "I am Colonel General Vomact of the Earth Medical Reserve. But you had better not wait for the Lord Crudelta."

"But *where* is he?"

"In my bed," said Vomact.

"Your *bed*?" cried the young

officer in complete amazement.

"In bed. Doped to the teeth. I fixed him up. He was excited. Take your men out. We'll treat the wounded on the lawn. You can see the dead in the refrigerators downstairs in a few minutes, except for the ones that went smoky from direct hits."

"But the fight . . .?"

"A mistake, young man, or else—"

"Or else what?" shouted the young officer, horrified at the utter mess of his own combat experience.

"Or else a weapon no man has ever seen before. Your troops fought each other. Your command was intercepted."

"I could see that," snapped the officer, "as soon as I saw Lansdale coming at me."

"But do you know what took him over?" said Vomact gently, while taking the officer by the arm and beginning to lead him out of the hospital. The captain went willingly, not noticing where he was going, so eagerly did he watch for the other man's words.

"I think I know," said Vomact. "Another man's dreams. Dreams which have learned how to turn themselves into electricity or plastic or stone. Or anything else. Dreams coming to us out of space three."

The young officer nodded dumbly. This was too much.

"Space three?" he murmured. It was like being told that the really alien invaders, whom men had been expecting for thirteen thousand years and had never met, were waiting for him on the grass. Until now space three had been a mathematical idea, a romancer's day-dream, but not a fact.

The sir and doctor Vomact did not even ask the young officer. He brushed the young man gently at the nape of the neck and shot him through with tranquilizer. Vomact then led him out to the grass. The young captain stood alone and whistled happily at the stars in the sky. Behind him, his sergeants and corporals were sorting out the survivors and getting treatment for the wounded.

The two minutes' war was over.

Rambo had stopped dreaming that his Elizabeth was in danger. He had recognized, even in his deep sick sleep, that the tramping in the corridor was the movement of armed men. His mind had set up defenses to protect Elizabeth. He took over command of the forward troops and set them to stopping the main body. The powers which space had worked into him made this easy for him to do, even though he did not know that he was doing it.

HOW many dead?" said Vomact to Grosbeck and Timofeyev.

"About two hundred."

"And how many irrecoverable dead?"

"The ones that got turned into smoke. A dozen, maybe fourteen. The other dead can be fixed up, but most of them will have to get new personality prints."

"Do you know what happened?" asked Vomact.

"No, Sir and Doctor," they both chorused.

"I do. I think I do. No, I *know* I do. It's the wildest story in the history of man. Our patient did it—Rambo. He took over the troops and set them against each other. That Lord of the Instrumentality who came charging in—Crudelta. I've known him for a long long time. He's behind this case. He thought that troops would help, not sensing that troops would invite attack upon themselves. And there is something else."

"Yes?" they said, in unison.

"Rambo's woman—the one he's looking for. She must be here."

"Why?" said Timofeyev.

"Because *he's* here."

"You're assuming that he came here because of his own will, Sir and Doctor."

Vomact smiled the wise crafty smile of his family; it was almost a trademark of the Vomact house.

"I am assuming all the things which I cannot otherwise prove.

"First, I assume that he came here naked out of space itself, driven by some kind of force which we cannot even guess.

"Second, I assume he came *here* because he wanted something. A woman named Elizabeth, who must already be here. In a moment we can go inventory all our Elizabeths.

"Third, I assume that the Lord Crudelta knew something about it. He has led troops into the building. He began raving when he saw me. I know hysterical fatigue, as do you, my brothers, so I condemned him for a night's sleep.

"Fourth, let's leave our man alone. There'll be hearings and trials enough, Space knows, when all these events get scrambled out."

Vomact was right.

He was usually was.

Trials did follow.

It was lucky that Old Earth no longer permitted newspapers or television news. The population would have been frothed up to riot and terror if they had ever found out what happened at the Old Main Hospital just to the West of Meeya Meefla.

TWENTY-ONE days later, Vo-mact, Timofeyev and Grosbeck were summoned to the trial of the Lord Crudelta. A full panel of seven Lords of the Instrumentality were there to give Crudelta an ample hearing and, if required, a sudden death. The doctors were present both as doctors for Elizabeth and Rambo and as witnesses for the Investigating Lord.

Elizabeth, fresh up from being dead, was as beautiful as a newborn baby in exquisite, adult feminine form. Rambo could not take his eyes off her, but a look of bewilderment went over his face every time she gave him a friendly, calm remote little smile. (She had been told that she was his girl, and she was prepared to believe it, but she had no memory of him or of anything else more than sixty hours back, when speech had been reinstalled in her mind; and he, for his part, was still thick of speech and subject to strains which the doctors could not quite figure out.)

The Investigating Lord was a man named Starmount.

He asked the panel to rise.

They did so.

He faced the Lord Crudelta with great solemnity, "You are obliged, my Lord Crudelta, to speak quickly and clearly to this court."

"Yes, my Lord," he answered.

"We have the summary power."

"You have the summary power. I recognize it."

"You will tell the truth or else you will lie."

"I shall tell the truth or I will lie."

"You may lie, if you wish, about matters of fact and opinion, but you will in no case lie about human relationships. If you do lie, nevertheless, you will ask that your name be entered in the Roster of Dishonor."

"I understand the panel and the rights of this panel. I will lie if I wish—though I don't think I will need to do so—" and here Crudelta flashed a weary intelligent smile at all of them—"but I will not lie about matters of relationship. If I do, I will ask for dishonor."

"You have yourself been well trained as a Lord of the Instrumentality?"

"I have been so trained and I love the Instrumentality well. In fact, I am myself the Instrumentality, as are you, and as are the honorable Lords beside you. I shall behave well, for as long as I live this afternoon."

"Do you credit him, my Lords?" asked Starmount.

The members of the panel nodded their mitred heads. They had dressed ceremonially for the occasion.

"Do you have a relationship to the woman Elizabeth?"

The members of the trial panel caught their breath as they saw Crudelta turn white: "My Lords!" he cried, and answered no further.

"It is the custom," said Starmount firmly, "that you answer promptly or that you die."

The Lord Crudelta got control of himself. "I am answering. I did not know who she was, except for the fact that Rambo loved her. I sent her to Earth from Earth Four, where I then was. Then I told Rambo that she had been murdered and hung desperately at the edge of death, wanting only his help to return to the green fields of life."

Said Starmount: "Was that the truth?"

"My Lord and Lords, it was a lie."

"Why did you tell it?"

"To induce rage in Rambo and to give him an overriding reason for wanting to come to Earth faster than any man has ever come before."

"A-a-ah! A-a-ah!" Two wild cries came from Rambo, more like the call of an animal than like the sound of a man.

VOMACT looked at his patient, felt himself beginning to growl with a deep internal rage. Rambo's powers, generated in the depths of space, had begun

to operate again. Vomact made a sign. The robot behind Rambo had been coded to keep Rambo calm. Though the robot had been enamelled to look like a white gleaming hospital orderly, he was actually a police-robot of high powers, built up with an electronic cortex based on the frozen midbrain of an old wolf. (A wolf was a rare animal, something like a dog.) The robot touched Rambo, who dropped off to sleep. Doctor Vomact felt the anger in his own mind fade away. He lifted his hand gently; the robot caught the signal and stopped applying the narcoleptic radiation. Rambo slept normally; Elizabeth looked worriedly at the man whom she had been told was her own.

The Lords turned back from the glances at Rambo.

Said Starmount, icily: "And why did you do that?"

"Because I wanted him to travel through space-three."

"Why?"

"To show it could be done."

"And do you, my Lord Crudelta, affirm that this man has in fact travelled through space-three?"

"I do."

"Are you lying?"

"I have the right to lie, but I have no wish to do so. In the name of the Instrumentality itself, I tell you that this is the truth."

The panel members gasped. Now there was no way out. Either the Lord Crudelta was telling the truth, *which meant that all former times had come to an end and that a new age had begun for all the kinds of mankind*, or else he was lying in the face of the most powerful form of affirmation which any of them knew.

Even Starmount himself took a different tone. His teasing, restless, intelligent voice took on a new timbre of kindness.

"You do therefore assert that this man has come back from outside our galaxy with nothing more than his own natural skin to cover him? No instruments? No power?"

"I did not say that," said Crudelta. "Other people have begun to pretend I used such words. I tell you, my Lords that I planoformed for twelve consecutive Earth Days and nights. Some of you may remember where Outpost Baiter Gator is. Well, I had a good Go-captain, and he took me four long jumps beyond there, out into intergalactic space. I left this man there. When I reached Earth, he had been here twelve days, more or less. I have assumed, therefore, that his trip was more or less instantaneous. I was on my way back to Baiter Gator, counting by Earth time, when the doctor here found this man on the grass outside the hospital."

Vomact raised his hand. The Lord Starmount gave him the right to speak, "My sirs and Lords, we did not find this man on the grass. The robots did, and made a record. But even the robots did not see or photograph his arrival."

"We know that," said Starmount angrily, "and we know that we have been told that nothing came to Earth by any means whatever, in that particular quarter hour. Go on, my Lord Crudelta. What relation are you to Rambo?"

"He is my victim."

"Explain yourself!"

I COMPUTED him out. I asked the machines where I would be most apt to find a man with a tremendous lot of rage in him, and was informed that on Earth Four the rage level had been left high because that particular planet had a considerable need for explorers and adventurers, in whom rage was a strong survival trait. When I got to Earth Four, I commanded the authorities to find out which border cases had exceeded the limits of allowable rage. They gave me four men. One was much too large. Two were old. This man was the only candidate for my excitement. I chose him."

"What did you tell him?"

"Tell him? I told him his sweetheart was dead or dying."

"No, no," said Starmount. "Not at the moment of crisis. What did you tell him to make him cooperate in the first place?"

"I told him," said the Lord Crudelta evenly, "that I was myself a Lord of the Instrumentality and that I would kill him myself if he did not obey, and obey promptly."

"And under what custom or law did you act?"

"Reserved material," said the Lord Crudelta promptly. "There are telepaths here who are not a part of the Instrumentality. I beg leave to defer until we have a shielded place."

Several members of the panel nodded and Starmount agreed with them. He changed the line of questioning.

"You forced this man, therefore, to do something which he did not wish to do?"

"That is right," said the Lord Crudelta.

"Why didn't you go yourself, if it is that dangerous?"

"My Lords and honorables, it was the nature of the experiment that the experimenter himself should not be expended in the first try. Artyr Rambo has indeed travelled through space-three. I shall follow him myself, in due course." (How the Lord Crudelta did so is another tale, told about another time.) "If I had gone and if I had been lost, that would have been the

end of the space-three trials. At least for our time."

"Tell us the exact circumstances under which you last saw Artyr Rambo before you met after the battle in the old Main Hospital."

"We had put him in a rocket of the most ancient style. We also wrote writing on the outside of it, just the way the Ancients did when they first ventured into space. Ah, that was a beautiful piece of engineering and archeology! We copied everything right down to the correct models of fourteen thousand years ago, when the Paroskii and Murkins were racing each other into space. The rocket was white, with a red and white gantry beside it. The letters IOM were on the rocket, not that the words mattered. The rocket has gone into nowhere, but the passenger sits here. It rose on a stool of fire. The stool became a column. Then the landing field disappeared."

"And the landing field," said Starmount quietly, "what was that?"

"A modified planoform ship. We have had ships go milky in space because they faded molecule by molecule. We have had others disappear utterly. The engineers had changed this around. We took out all the machinery needed for circumnavigation, for survival or for comfort. The landing field was to last three or

four seconds, no more. Instead, we put in fourteen planoform devices, all operating in tandem, so that the ship would do what other ships do when they planoform—namely, drop one of our familiar dimensions and pick up a new dimension from some unknown category of space—but do it with such force as to get out of what people call space-two and move over into space-three.”

“And space-three, what did you expect of that?”

“I thought that it was universal and instantaneous, in relation to our universe. That everything was equally distant from everything else. That Rambo, wanting to see his girl again, would move in a thousandth of a second from the empty space beyond Outpost Baiter Gator into the hospital where she was.”

“And, my Lord Crudelta, what made you think so?”

“A hunch, my Lord, for which you are welcome to kill me.”

Starmount turned to the panel. “I suspect, my Lords, that you are more likely to doom him to long life, great responsibility, immense rewards, and the fatigue of being his own difficult and complicated self.”

The mitres moved gently and the members of the panel rose.

“You, my Lord Crudelta, will sleep till the trial is finished.”

A robot stroked him and he fell asleep.

“Next witness,” said the Lord Starmount, “in five minutes.”

11

VOMACT tried to keep Rambo from being heard as a witness. He argued fiercely with the Lord Starmount in the intermission. “You Lords have shot up my hospital, abducted two of my patients and now you are going to torment both Rambo and Elizabeth. Can’t you leave them alone? Rambo is in no condition to give coherent answers and Elizabeth may be damaged if she sees him suffer.”

The Lord Starmount said to him, “You have your rules, doctor, and we have ours. This trial is being recorded, inch by inch and moment by moment. Nothing is going to be done to Rambo unless we find that he has planet-killing powers. If that is true, of course, we will ask you to take him back to the hospital and to put him to death very pleasantly. But I don’t think it will happen. We want his story so that we can judge my colleague Crudelta. Do you think that the Instrumentality would survive if it did not have fierce internal discipline?”

Vomact nodded sadly; he went back to Grosbeck and Timofeyev, murmuring sadly to them, “Rambo’s in for it. There’s nothing we could do.”

The panel reassembled. They put on their judicial mitres. The lights of the room darkened and the weird blue light of justice was turned on.

The robot orderly helped Rambo to the witness chair.

"You are obliged," said Starmount, "to speak quickly and clearly to this court."

"You're not Elizabeth," said Rambo.

"I am the Lord Starmount," said the investigating lord, quickly deciding to dispense with the formalities. "Do you know me?"

"No," said Rambo.

"Do you know where you are?"

"Earth," said Rambo.

"Do you wish to lie or to tell the truth?"

"A lie," said Rambo, "is the only truth which men can share with each other, so I will tell you lies, the way we always do."

"Can you report your trip?"

"No."

"Why not, citizen Rambo?"

"Words won't describe it."

"Do you remember your trip?"

"Do you remember your pulse of two minutes ago?" countered Rambo.

"I am not playing with you," said Starmount. "We think you have been in space-three and we want you to testify about the Lord Crudelta?"

"Oh!" said Rambo. "I don't

like him. I never did like him."

"Will you nevertheless try to tell us what happened to you?"

"Should I, Elizabeth?" asked Rambo of the girl, who sat in the audience.

She did not stammer. "Yes," she said, in a clear voice which rang through the big room. "Tell them, so that we can find our lives again."

"I will tell you," said Rambo.

"When did you last see the Lord Crudelta?"

"When I was stripped and fitted to the rocket, four jumps out beyond Outpost Baiter Gator. He was on the ground. He waved goodbye to me."

"And then what happened?"

"The rocket rose. It felt very strange, like no craft I had ever been in before. I weighed many, many gravities."

"And then?"

"The engines went on. I was thrown out of space itself."

"What did it seem like?"

"Behind me I left the working ships, the cloth and the food which goes through space. I went down rivers which did not exist. I felt people around me though I could not see them, red people shooting arrows at live bodies."

"Where were you?" asked a panel member.

"In the winter time where there is no summer. In an emptiness like a child's mind. In peninsulas which had torn loose

from the land. And I *was* the ship."

"You were what?" asked the same panel member.

"The rocket nose. The cone. The boat. I was drunk. It was drunk. I was the drunkboat myself," said Rambo.

"And where did you go?" resumed Starmount.

"Where crazy lanterns stared with idiot eyes. Where the waves washed back and forth with the dead of all the ages. Where the stars became a pool, and I swam in it. Where blue turns to liquor, stronger than alcohol, wilder than music, fermented with the *red red reds* of love. I saw all the things that men have ever thought they saw, but it was me who really saw them. I've heard phosphorescence singing and tides that seemed like crazy cattle clawing their way out of the ocean, their hooves beating the reefs. You will not believe me, but I found Floridas wilder than this, where the flowers had human skins and eyes like big cats."

"What are you talking about?" asked the Lord Starmount.

"What I found in space," snapped Artyr Rambo. "Believe it or not. This is what I now remember. Maybe it's a dream, but it's all I have. It was years and years and it was the blink of an eye. I dreamed green nights. I felt places where the whole hor-

izon became one big waterfall. The boat that was me met children and I showed them El Dorado, where the gold men live. The people drowned in space washed gently past me. I was a boat where all the lost space ships lay drowned and still. Seahorses which were not real ran beside me. The summer month came and hammered down the sun. I went past archipelagoes of stars, where the delirious skies opened up for wanderers. I cried for me. I wept for man. I wanted to be the drunkboat sinking. I sank. I fell. It seemed to me that the grass was a lake, where a sad child, on hands and knees, sailed a toy boat as fragile as a butterfly in spring. I can't forget the pride of unremembered flags, the arrogance of prisons which I suspected, the swimming of the businessmen! Then I was on the grass."

"This may have scientific value," said the Lord Starmount, "but it is not of judicial importance. Do you have any comment on what you did during the battle in the hospital?"

Rambo was quick and looked sane: "What I did, I did not do. What I did not do, I cannot tell. Let me go, because I am tired of you and space, big men and big things. Let me sleep and let me get well."

Starmount lifted his hand for silence.

The panel members stared at him.

Only the few telepaths present knew that they had all said, "*Aye. Let the man go. Let the girl go. Let the doctors go.* But bring back the Lord Crudelta later on. He has many troubles ahead of him, and we wish to add to them."

12

BETWEEN the Instrumentality, the Manhome Government and the authorities at the Old Main Hospital, everyone wished to give Rambo and Elizabeth happiness.

As Rambo got well, much of his Earth Four memory returned. The trip faded from his mind.

When he came to know Elizabeth, he hated the girl.

This was not his girl—his bold, saucy, Elizabeth of the markets and the valleys, of the snowy hills and the long boat rides. This was somebody meek, sweet, sad and hopelessly loving.

Vomact cured that.

He sent Rambo to the Pleasure City of the Herperides, where bold and talkative women pursued him because he was rich and famous.

In a few weeks—a very few indeed—he wanted *his* Elizabeth, this strange shy girl who had been cooked back from the dead while he rode space with his own fragile bones.

"Tell the truth, darling." He spoke to her once gravely and seriously. "The Lord Crudelta did not arrange the accident which killed you?"

"They say he wasn't there," said Elizabeth. "They say it was an actual accident. I don't know. I will never know."

"It doesn't matter now," said Rambo. "Crudelta's off among the stars, looking for trouble and finding it. We have our bungalow, and our waterfall, and each other."

"Yes, my darling," she said, "each other. And no fantastic Floridas for us."

He blinked at this reference to the past, but he said nothing. A man who has been through space, needs very little in life, outside of *not* going back to space. Sometimes he dreamed he was the rocket again, the old rocket taking off on an impossible trip. Let other men follow! he thought, let other men go! I have Elizabeth and I am here.

THE END

Illustrated
by SCHELLING



THE FASTEST DRAW

By LARRY EISENBERG

Steinberg was an electronic genius. Here, the Old West was dead and gone for many decades, but now once again a man could stroll down Main Street for a showdown with the Marshal.

LIKE most men, Amos Handworthy was a creature of many parts. To his business associates he was a sober, calculating entrepreneur, given occasionally to rash ventures which through outrageous turns of luck usually ended well. To his employees he was a distant, ominous figure, wandering through his electronics plant occasionally, staring with pale blue eyes at a myriad of trivial details, sifting through the reject box of discarded transistors and occasionally stopping to ask a loaded but seemingly innocuous question of one of the production engineers. To his housekeeper he was a brusque, harsh man, not given overly to entertaining or keeping late hours but sober, sedate and completely absorbed in his pervasive habit of collecting automata.

Very few men had ever seen the eyes of Amos Handworthy come aglow and Manny Steinberg was one of them. Manny was a superb engineer who combined the ability to carry out a sophisticated circuit design with the old fashioned desire to tinker. It was almost physically painful for him to pass by a mechanical device that was not in working order. And so, in his first visit to the Pecos Saloon, a town landmark that had been restored to its pristine décor through the generosity of

Amos Handworthy, Manny caught sight of the magnificent music making machine as soon as he cut through the swinging doors. He proceeded first to the bar and availed himself of the tequila and lemon juice which was the specialty of the house. Much of the town showed the influence of its close location to the Mexican border, the large Spanish speaking population, the frioles that were vended off street carts, and the tastes in liquor.

Still sucking on the lemon, Manny walked over and surveyed the glass enclosed music maker, four vertical violins arrayed in a circle with a hoop of horse hair spanning about the four violin bridges, electromagnet stops hovering above the strings. A dried out square of paper had been crudely taped across the glass with the clear inked inscription, "Out of Order." He had removed the back door of the machine and was examining the innards when he felt a proprietary hand on his shoulder and swivelled about to meet the questioning gaze of his boss, Amos Handworthy.

"I think I can make it go," said Manny, not certain that he could but unable to leave this marvelous array of gears, levers, and multi-pinned rotating disks.

"I've tried to have it repaired and failed," said Amos Hand-

worthy. "But if you can do it, its worth a thousand dollars to me."

MANNY nodded as though this offer had tipped the balance but in truth it made very little difference to him. Even the following week, when he demonstrated to a full saloon how beautifully the four violins played the Mephisto Waltz, he accepted the check which Amos Handworthy placed in his hand with some puzzlement, not quite connecting it with the maintenance miracle he had just wrought. Handworthy insisted on having the machine play again and again, but after the fourth successful round, Many had lost interest in the device and was more concerned in downing tequilas than in listening to the music.

Later that night, as he lay abed on a rumpled sweat-wet sheet, wondering how in hell he had taken a job in this God-forsaken town in Texas, he remembered dimly that his boss, Mr. Handworthy, had invited him over to the stately Handworthy Mansion. He was not sure when the invitation was for, or whether the occasion was of a business or social character, but he knew that it was mandatory that he come.

Fortunately, a handwritten note on gray, unembossed letter paper arrived the following day,

confirming the invitation and specifying a dinner date the following Friday evening at eight P.M. Manny's income was a good one and he had eaten in some of the finest restaurants in the country but he had never been to the home of a truly wealthy man before. It was with no little trepidation that he appeared at the door of the Handworthy Mansion and was ushered into the house by the liveried butler who was, to Manny's intense surprise, white.

He was somewhat taken aback to find that he was the only dinner guest and that the burden of making conversation would be totally his job. But he found that contrary to his expectation, Amos Handworthy did almost all of the talking.

The food was plentiful but not lavish or exotic in character. Mr. Handworthy himself carved out liberal slices off the huge side of beef that was brought in on a great silver salver. And although Mr. Handworthy did not drink it, the wine was carefully chilled and of good (but not the best) quality.

Since Manny had been raised in a low income Jewish inhabited section of New York City and had, despite his extensive rootless shifting about the country, no real insight into how anybody else lived, he found himself quite taken with the rambling tales

that Amos Handworthy told of his town's history.

MY father," said Amos Handworthy toward the close of the dinner, "was one of the last frontier marshals and maybe *the greatest*. His draw was reputed to be so fast that the eye could barely follow it and he never missed his target."

"But he drank like a fish," he thought, "and spent most of his time at the sporting house on East Maple."

"As a boy," he said aloud, "I could think of nothing more ideal than to follow in his footsteps when I grew up. Course, when I *had* grown up, there was no more frontier, no more show downs in the center of town. It was a terrible disappointment and one that I haven't gotten over, even yet."

"My father," said Manny pensively, "claimed that I had clumsy wooden hands. He was wrong and I think he knew it. But he'd never admit it to me."

"Do you know what disturbs me?" said Amos Handworthy. "There have been challenges for me, some financial, some physical, others social, and I've met and beaten every one of them. But I've never been in the same mother naked kind of situation my Father had to meet where it was one man's raw courage and skill against another's."

"The thing that disturbs me," said Manny, "is that whenever I knock off a particularly tough job, instead of being elated, I'm totally depressed until the next challenging one comes along."

Amos Handworthy raised the wine bottle to the light and studied the play of color through the thickened glass.

"Come inside," he said abruptly. "I've got something special I want to show you."

Manny followed after his host and found himself in a huge, high ceilinged room flanked on all four walls by reward posters, some as much as one hundred years old. There were no furnishings in the room, just a series of unusual pieces of furniture that proved on closer scrutiny to be automata of diverse types. In the center of the room was a great amorphous mass covered by an enormous sheet.

"I have no kin," said Handworthy, staring possessively about him. "I've never married so I have no children. But I'm a happy man nevertheless. These are my children," he said, gesticulating about him. "This one, is a particular delight," he added, his voice swelling with pride as he brought Manny over for a closer view.

IT was a gray enamelled case surmounted by a glistening blue hemisphere adorned with

tiny stars of silver and gold. Within the hemisphere was an exquisite miniature ball room, the walls lined with mirrors, and when Handworthy wound up the movement and released the catch, two groups of tiny dancers began to waltz toward each other. Their images were caught up and multiplied an hundred-fold in the mirrors creating a truly breathtaking sight as the unseen strings of a harp were plucked below in the gray enamelled case.

Before Manny could comment, he was whisked over to a superbly crafted wooden figure of a charming child, a painted smile wreathing the gently carved mouth. The child was seated on a mahogany stool and when the latching hook had been lowered, it leaned forward and after dipping a feathered pen into an inkwell, began to write in smooth cursive flow. When she leaned back, her motions apparently brought to a close, Manny bent forward and found to his intense amazement a beautifully crafted letter of some fifty words written to the mother of the child.

There were other amazing sights, an android that fingered and breathed wind into a flute that played sweetly, a reclining Cleopatra that rose, bowed gravely at the waist and then lay down once more upon her feathered couch. Since each of

the treasured machines was in perfect functioning order, Manny rapidly lost interest and merely followed Handworthy about, nodding politely, his mind distant upon a persistent circuit problem that was still unsolved. But he was jarred back to reality when, with the reverence that one would use to lay bare a sleeping nymph, Handworthy removed the sheet from the huge centerpiece of the room. It was a small segment of a Western street, complete with hitching post, before which stood an uncannily lifelike figure of a town marshal, complete with vest and badge, chaps and holstered gun. The painted face was scowling and from closer scrutiny it was apparent that the figure was capable of complex motion.

"The others," said Amos Handworthy, "are marvelous antiques that I've collected, but this fellow was made to my own specifications in Switzerland. His clothing is quite authentic and he really works. Watch this!"

He stepped forward and took a loosely draped gun belt off the hitching post to the right of the Marshal and buckled it about his waist.

"The device is electrically operated," he continued. "The instant I draw, the Marshal draws too, and the trick is to hit him somewhere on his target photo-

cells with a beam of light that flashes out of my gun, before he can get off his shot. I can adjust the speed of his draw within fairly wide limits and I've been moving him up to faster and faster speeds. But I've gotten pretty damn fast."

WITH a drawing motion that was almost a blur, he whipped out his gun and pulled the trigger. The Marshal was fast, but apparently not as fast for suddenly a recorded voice bellowed in pain and gasped, "you got me, you dirty varmint."

"A little touch of my own," said Amos Handworthy. "That's what happens when I hit him."

He looked down at his gun, almost proudly, and Manny had the eerie feeling that it was only with restraint that he did not blow the imaginary smoke away from the gun barrel.

"That's a highly imaginative device," said Manny.

"He is," said Amos Handworthy. "But he's still not quite what I want him to be. I have an idea that you can make him the kind of opponent I need."

"What do you want?" said Manny. All of his ennui was beginning to evaporate and the familiar exultant response to challenge had begun to grow in him.

"I want him to be able to hit

me, too, figuratively speaking," said Amos Handworthy. "As things stand now, this shoot out is entirely one sided. I'd like to know, for instance, if he's been able to hit me."

"I can do it," said Manny. "You'll have to get me off my regular project, but I can do it."

"I'll call your division chief in the morning," said Amos Handworthy. "You'll stay here with me and you can have all the time you need."

Manny did not sleep well in his spacious overly comfortable bed. He was up early the following morning pouring over the construction plans for the Marshal and examining the instruction folder which the Swiss company, with typical thoroughness, had included in the neatly packed maintenance kit. He caught the guiding concept of the design at once, and made his plans to modify the Marshal along lines that incorporated control techniques that were basically electronic.

He phoned the plant and requisitioned transistors, metal film resistors, capacitors, and various other components necessary for his task. Handworthy did not approach him as he worked and his meals were served to him either in his own room or the great room where all the automata were located. He made all the changes himself, snipping leads, soldering, forming tight

mechanical joints with deft fingers that almost seemed alive and apart from his body.

TEN days later, he called in Amos Handworthy and demonstrated what he had done.

"I've modified both guns so that you and the Marshal will now shoot at each other with ultra violet light. You'll both wear vests that are sensitive to this light. I monitor the hits electrically by measuring the resistance of those areas where a bullet would severely injure a man. Nothing will occur unless you or the Marshal are hit in such an area. Furthermore, you can both continue to shoot for an indefinite length of time. However, I've altered the Marshal's aiming mechanism so that if he's hit in a vital spot, he won't shoot as accurately. Similarly, if you are hit, a defocusing mechanism operates on your light bulb so that your gun is no longer as accurate. And instead of the recorded voice, if either of you is hit in the heart, your gun goes dead."

Amos Handworthy's eyes began to glow with a fire such as Manny Steinberg had never seen and it excited him that his work had brought on so wonderful a response. He slipped the new vest on Handworthy, handed him the wired holster and gun, and stepped back. After fasten-

ing his belt and readying himself, Handworthy drew as before and fired swiftly at the Marshal, who was firing back almost as rapidly. Suddenly Handworthy stopped and looked at his gun in dismay.

"My trigger's locked," he cried.

"He's killed you," said Manny drily. "You beat him to the draw, but he's hit you in the heart."

"I see," said Handworthy slowly. "Then it looks like I've got a hell of a lot more practicing to do."

* * *

IT was a full month before Manny Steinberg was invited back to the Mansion, and with great pride his host demonstrated how he killed the Marshal, *every time*.

"I've got him set for his fastest draw, too," said Handworthy. "At this point, he's just no match for me."

"I guess that wraps it up," said Manny, knowing full well that it couldn't end this way. "You're just too damned good."

Amos Handworthy shook his head slowly.

"You don't believe that and neither do I. It's an unfair battle, unfair because we've excluded the most vital element of all."

"What element is that?" said Manny although the answer popped into his head even as he spoke and he began to envision

the approach that had to be taken.

"There's no *fear* in this situation," said Handworthy. "When two men were in an actual shoot-out they were both afraid of being killed. But the Marshal is oblivious to fear and so for the most part am I. Suppose for instance in some way you could make him shoot better if I were nervous and shoot less accurately if I were deadly calm."

"There is a way to do that," said Manny. "I can electrically monitor your vasomotor reflexes by means of your pulse and sweat reactions. Then I would program the Marshal's reflexes in just the way you suggest. But the thing I can't understand is how such a step would have any real meaning. Why in God's name would you ever be frightened? There's nothing in this situation to make it happen."

"I have a very vivid imagination," said Handworthy. "As a child I had no playmates and still I populated an entire world in my mind, every one a distinct person. Don't you see, I can project myself into feeling that I'm in the *real* life and death situation just as long as the Marshal becomes a creature sensitive to fear."

IT took Manny almost three weeks this time to make the requisite changes and he carried

out in addition an extensive series of pulse and skin resistance measurements on Handworthy. When he was satisfied that the Marshal had reached the ultimate state, he called in Handworthy and demonstrated what he had done.

"I've installed," said Manny, "a feedback circuit that's inoperative when your typical emotional reaction exists. But the circuit comes into play when you become more nervous than usual and the Marshal will therefore shoot faster and more accurately. On the other hand, if you should become less concerned, calmer perhaps, the Marshal's aim would tend to go askew and his firing rate would slow down. In other words, you and the Marshal are indissolubly linked through your nervous system whenever you strap on your shooting vest."

"Fine," said Amos Handworthy and the brilliance of his usually lackluster eyes gave an added emphasis to the word. "You've surpassed my greatest expectations with these new changes. And while I know it wasn't part of our bargain, I intend to add a pretty big sum to your monthly check."

"Thanks," said Manny automatically. Already he was becoming aware of the depression that followed his engineering triumphs. As he left the house,

he had almost completely lost interest in his accomplishment.

Meanwhile, Amos Handworthy was examining the guns with great care, particularly the tiny switch that activated the firing cycle. It was evident to him that as soon as his gun lifted off the switch, electrical activity commenced. After first unplugging the Marshal's electrical cable, he carefully removed the Ultra violet loaded guns from the fixture in his holster and the Marshal's holster, and replaced them with beautifully machined Colt .45's that were loaded with real bullets.

"There's absolutely no doubt that the mechanical action will be the same," thought Handworthy," and now the element of real fear, both *mine* and *his* will be in the picture. We're going to have a real shootout, the kind you don't see any more."

He replaced the plug in the

wall socket and turned about to face the Marshal quite squarely, shifting his belt around so that his gun would clear free of the holster. The Marshal stared at him out of sightless painted blue eyes, his mechanical hand resting stolidly on his gun.

"Even now, it isn't an even match," thought Handworthy ruefully. "I couldn't be any calmer than I am now. I guess it never can come out just exactly as I want it to."

As his fingers flashed lightning fast to his gun, it suddenly occurred to him that Manny was right, that he and the Marshal were indissolubly linked through his own nervous system. He had no kin, no wife, no children. The Marshal was the only one on earth really tied to him. And in that instant, a terrible surge of fear came over him at the thought of killing his own.

THE END



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*Max Fisher, who hadn't worked in years,
was now the President of the U.S. A fine thing for
a union man! Here's an uproariously funny,
terribly sad story of featherbedding in the future.*



STAND-BY

By
PHILIP K. DICK

Illustrated by SCHELLING

AN hour before his morning program on channel six, ranking news clown Jim Briskin sat in his private office with his production staff, conferring on the report of an unknown and possibly hostile flotilla detected at eight hundred astronomical units from the sun. It was big news, of course. But how should it be presented to his several-billion viewers scattered over three planets and seven moons?

Peggy Jones, his secretary, lit a cigarette and said, "Don't alarm them, Jim-Jam. Do it folksy-style." She leaned back, riffled the dispatches received by their commercial station from Uni-cephalon 40-D's teletypers.

It had been the homeostatic problem-solving structure Uni-cephalon 40-D at the White House in Washington, D.C. which had detected this possible external enemy; in its capacity as President of the United States it had at once dispatched ships of the line to stand picket duty. The flotilla appeared to be entering from another solar system entirely, but that fact of course would have to be determined by the picket ships.

"Folksy-style," Jim Briskin said glumly. "I grin and say, Hey look, comrades—it's happened at last, the thing we all feared, ha ha." He eyed her. "That'll get baskets full of laughs all over Earth and Mars

but just possibly not on the far-out moons." Because if there were some kind of attack it would be the farther colonists who would be hit first.

"No, they won't be amused," his continuity advisor Ed Fineberg agreed. He, too, looked worried; he had a family on Gany-mede.

"Is there any lighter piece of news?" Peggy asked. "By which you could open your program? The sponsor would like that." She passed the armload of news dispatches to Briskin. "See what you can do. Mutant cow obtains voting franchise in court case in Alabama . . . you know."

"I know," Briskin agreed as he began to inspect the dispatches. One such as his quaint account—it had touched the hearts of millions—of the mutant blue jay which learned, by great trial and effort, to sew. It had sewn itself and its progeny a nest, one April morning, in Bismark, North Dakota, in front of the TV cameras of Briskin's network.

ONE piece of news stood out; he knew intuitively, as soon as he saw it, that here he had what he wanted to lighten the dire tone of the day's news. Seeing it, he relaxed. The worlds went on with business as usual, despite this great news-break from eight hundred a.u.s. out.

"Look," he said, grinning.

"Old Gus Schatz is dead. Finally."

"Who's Gus Schatz?" Peggy asked, puzzled. "That name . . . it does sound familiar."

"The union man," Jim Briskin said. "You remember. The stand-by President, sent over to Washington by the union twenty-two years ago. He's dead, and the union—" He tossed her the dispatch; it was lucid and brief. "Now it's sending a new stand-by President over to take Schatz' place. I think I'll interview him. Assuming he can talk."

"That's right," Peggy said. "I keep forgetting. There still is a human stand-by in case Unicephalon fails. Has it ever failed?"

"No," Ed Fineberg said. "And it never will. So we have one more case of union featherbedding. The plague of our society."

"But still," Jim Briskin said, "people would be amused. The home life of the top stand-by in the country . . . why the union picked him, what his hobbies are. What this man, whoever he is, plans to do during his term to keep from going mad with boredom. Old Gus learned to bind books; he collected rare old motor magazines and bound them in vellum with gold-stamped lettering."

Both Ed and Peggy nodded in agreement. "Do that," Peggy urged him. "You can make it in-

teresting, Jim-Jam; you can make anything interesting. I'll place a call to the White House, or is the new man there yet?"

"Probably still at union headquarters in Chicago," Ed said. "Try a line there. Government Civil Servants' Union, East Division."

Picking up the phone, Peggy quickly dialed.

AT seven o'clock in the morning Maximilian Fischer sleepily heard noises; he lifted his head from the pillow, heard the confusion growing in the kitchen, the landlady's shrill voice, then men's voices which were unfamiliar to him. Groggily, he managed to sit up, shifting his bulk with care. He did not hurry; the doc had said not to overexert, because of the strain on his already-enlarged heart. So he took his time dressing.

Must be after a contribution to one of the funds, Max said to himself. It sounds like some of the fellas. Pretty early, though. He did not feel alarmed. I'm in good standing, he thought firmly. Nuthin to fear.

With care, he buttoned a five pink and green-striped silk shirt, one of his favorites. Gives me class, he thought as with labored effort he managed to bend far enough over to slip on his authentic simulated deerskin pumps. Be ready to meet them on an equal-

ity level, he thought as he smoothed his thinning hair before the mirror. If they shake me down too much I'll squawk directly to Pat Noble at the Noo York hiring hall; I mean, I don't have to stand for any stuff, I been in the union too long.

From the other room a voice bawled, "Fischer—get your clothes on and come out. We got a job for you and it begins today."

A job, Max thought with mixed feelings; he did not know whether to be glad or sorry. For over a year now he had been drawing from the union fund, as were most of his friends. Well what do you know. Cripes, he thought; suppose it's a hard job, like maybe I got to bend over all the time or move around. He felt anger. What a dirty deal. I mean, who do they think they are? Opening the door, he faced them. "Listen," he began, but one of the union officials cut him off.

"Pack your things, Fischer. Gus Schatz kicked the bucket and you got to go down to Washington, D.C. and take over the number one stand-by; we want you there before they abolish the position or something and we have to go out on strike or go to court. Mainly, we want to get someone right in clean and easy with no trouble; you understand? Make the transition so smooth that no one hardly takes notice."

At once, Max said, "What's it pay?"

Witheringly, the union official said, "You got no decision to make in this; *you're picked*. You want your freeloader fund-money cut off? You want to have to get out at your age and look for work?"

"Aw come on," Max protested. "I can pick up the phone and dial Pat Noble—"

The union officials were grabbing up objects here and there in the apartment. "We'll help you pack. Pat wants you in the White House by ten o'clock this morning."

"Pat!" Max echoed. He had been sold out.

The union officials, dragging suitcases from the closet, grinned.

SHORTLY, they were on their way across the flatlands of the Midwest by monorail. Moodily, Maximilian Fischer watched the countryside flash past; he said nothing to the officials flanking him, preferring to mull the matter over and over in his mind. What could he recall about the number one stand-by job? It began at eight a.m.—he recalled reading that. And there always were a lot of tourists flocking through the White House to catch a glimpse of Unicephalon 40-D, especially the school kids . . . and he disliked kids because

they always jeered at him due to his weight. Cripes, he'd have a million of them filing by, because he had to be on the premises. By law, he had to be within a hundred yards of Unicephalon 40-D at all times, day and night, or was it fifty yards? Anyhow it practically was right on top, so if the homeostatic problem-solving system failed—maybe I better bone up on this, he decided. Take a TV educational course on government administration, just in case.

To the union official on his right, Max asked, "Listen, good-member, do I have any powers in this job you guys got me? I mean, can I—"

"It's a union job like every other union job," the official answered wearily. "You sit. You stand by. Have you been out of work that long, you don't remember?" He laughed, nudging his companion. "Listen, Fischer here wants to know what authority the job entails." Now both men laughed. "I tell you what, Fischer," the official drawled. "When you're all set up there in the White House, when you got your chair and bed and made all your arrangements for meals and laundry and TV viewing time, why don't you amble over to Unicephalon 40-D and just sort of whine around there, you know, scratch and whine, until it notices you."

"Lay off," Max muttered.

"And then," the official continued, "you sort of say, Hey Unicephalon, listen. I'm your buddy. How about a little 'I scratch your back, you scratch mine.' You pass an ordinance for me—"

"But what can he do in exchange?" the other union official asked.

"Amuse it. He can tell it the story of his life, how he rose out of poverty and obscurity and educated himself by watching TV seven days a week until finally, guess what, he rose all the way to the top; he got the job—" The official snickered. "Of stand-by President."

Maximilian, flushing, said nothing; he stared woodenly out of the monorail window.

* * *

When they reached Washington, D.C. and the White House, Maximilian Fischer was shown a little room. It had belonged to Gus, and although the faded old motor magazines had been cleared out, a few prints remained tacked on the walls: a 1963 Volvo S-122, a 1957 Peugeot 403 and other antique classics of a bygone age. And, on a bookcase, Max saw a hand-carved plastic model of a 1950 Studebaker Starlight coupe, with each detail perfect.

"He was making that when he croaked," one of the union offi-

cials said as he set down Max's suitcase. "He could tell you any fact there is about those old pre-turbine cars—any useless bit of car knowledge."

Max nodded.

"You got any idea what you're going to do?" the official asked him.

"Aw hell," Max said, "How could I decide so soon? Give me time." Moodily, he picked up the Studebaker Starlight coupe and examined its underside. The desire to smash the model car came to him; he put the car down, then, turning away.

"Make a rubber band ball," the official said.

"What?" Max said.

"The stand-by before Gus. Louis somebody-or-other . . . he collected rubber bands, made a huge ball, big as a house, by the time he died. I forget his name, but the rubber band ball is at the Smithsonian now."

There was a stir in the hallway. A White House receptionist, a middle-aged woman severely dressed, put her head in the room and said, "Mr. President, there's a TV news clown here to interview you. Please try to finish with him as quickly as possible because we have quite a few tours passing through the building today and some may want to look at you."

"Okay," Max said. He turned to face the TV news clown. It

was Jim-Jam Briskin, he saw, the ranking clown just now. "You want to see me?" he asked Briskin haltingly. "I mean, you're sure it's *me* you want to interview?" He could not imagine what Briskin could find of interest about him. Holding out his hand he added, "This is my room, but these model cars and pics aren't mine; they were Gus'. I can't tell you nuthin' about them."

ON Briskin's head the familiar flaming-red clown wig glowed, giving him in real life the same bizarre cast that the TV cameras picked up so well. He was older, however, than the TV image indicated, but he had the friendly, natural smile that everyone looked for: it was his badge of informality, a really nice guy, even-tempered but with a caustic wit when occasion demanded. Briskin was the sort of man who . . . well, Max thought, the sort of fella you'd like to see marry into your family.

They shook hands. Briskin said, "You're on camera, Mr. Max Fischer. Or rather, Mr. President, I should say. This is Jim-Jam talking. For our literally billions of viewers located in every niche and corner of this far-flung solar system of ours, let me ask you this. How does it feel, sir, to know that if Uni-cephalon 40-D should fail, even

momentarily, you would be catapulted into the most important post that has ever fallen onto the shoulders of a human being, that of actual, not merely stand-by, President of the United States? Does it worry you at night," He smiled. Behind him the camera technicians swung their mobile lenses back and forth; lights burned Max's eyes and he felt the heat beginning to make him sweat under his arms and on his neck and upper lip. "What emotions grip you at this instant?" Briskin asked. "As you stand on the threshold of this new task for perhaps the balance of your life? What thoughts run through your mind, now that you're actually here in the White House?"

After a pause, Max said, "It's—a big responsibility." And then he realized, he saw, that Briskin was laughing at him, laughing silently as he stood there. Because it was all a gag Briskin was pulling. Out in the planets and moons his audience knew it, too; they knew Jim-Jam's humor.

"You're a large man, Mr. Fischer," Briskin said. "If I may say so, a stout man. Do you get much exercise? I ask this because with your new job you pretty well will be confined to this room, and I wondered what change in your life this would bring about."

"Well," Max said, "I feel of

course that a Government employee should always be at his post. Yes, what you say is true; I have to be right here day and night, but that doesn't bother me. I'm prepared for it."

"Tell me," Jim Briskin said, "do you—" And then he ceased. Turning to the video technicians behind him he said in an odd voice, "We're off the air."

A man wearing headphones squeezed forward past the cameras. "On the monitor, listen." He hurriedly handed the headphones to Briskin. "We've been pre-empted by Unicephalon; it's broadcasting a news bulletin."

Briskin held the phones to his ear. His face writhed and he said, "Those ships at eight hundred a.u.s. They are hostile, it says." He glanced up sharply at his technicians, the red clown's wig sliding askew. "They've begun to attack."

WITHIN the following twenty-four hours the aliens had managed not only to penetrate the Sol System but also to knock out Unicephalon 40-D.

News of this reached Maximilian Fischer in an indirect manner as he sat in the White House cafeteria having his supper.

"Mr. Maximilian Fischer?"

"Yeah," Max said, glancing up at the group of Secret Servicemen who had surrounded his table.

"You're President of the United States."

"Naw," Max said, "I'm the stand-by President; that's different."

The Secret Serviceman said, "Unicephalon 40-D is out of commission for perhaps as long as a month. So according to the amended Constitution, you're President and also Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. We're here to guard you." The Secret Serviceman grinned ludicrously. Max grinned back. "Do you understand?" the Secret Serviceman asked. "I mean, does it penetrate?"

"Sure," Max said. Now he understood the buzz of conversation he had overheard while waiting in the cafeteria line with his tray. It explained why White House personnel had looked at him strangely. He set down his coffee cup, wiped his mouth with his napkin, slowly and deliberately, pretended to be absorbed in solemn thought. But actually his mind was empty.

"We've been told," the Secret Serviceman said, "that you're needed at once at the National Security Council bunker. They want your participation in finalization of strategy deliberations."

They walked from the cafeteria to the elevator.

"Strategy policy," Max said, as they descended. "I got a few

opinions about that. I guess it's time to deal harshly with these alien ships, don't you agree?"

The Secret Servicemen nodded. "Yes, we got to show we're not afraid," Max said. "Sure, we'll get finalization; we'll blast the buggers."

The Secret Servicemen laughed good-naturedly.

Pleased, Max nudged the leader of the group. "I think we're pretty goddam strong; I mean, the U.S.A. has got teeth."

"You tell 'em, Max," one of the Secret Servicemen said, and they all laughed aloud, Max included.

As they stepped from the elevator they were stopped by a tall, well-dressed man who said urgently, "Mr. President, I'm Jonathan Kirk, White House press secretary; I think before you go in there to confer with the NSC people you should address the nation in this hour of gravest peril. The public wants to see what their new leader is like." He held out a paper. "Here's a statement drawn up by the Political Advisory Board; it codifies your—"

"Nuts," Max said, handing it back without looking at it. "I'm the President, not you. I don't even know you. Kirk? Burke? Shirk? Never heard of you. Show me the microphone and I'll make my own speech. Or get me Pat Noble; maybe he's got some ideas." And then he remembered

that Pat had sold him out in the first place; Pat had gotten him into this. "Not him either," Max said. "Just give me the microphone."

"This is a time of crisis," Kirk grated.

"Sure," Max said, "so leave me alone; you keep out of my way and I'll keep out of yours. Ain't that right?" He slapped Kirk good-naturedly on the back. "And we'll both be better off."

A GROUP of people with portable TV cameras and lighting appeared, and among them Max saw Jim-Jam Briskin, in the middle, with his staff.

"Hey, Jim-Jam," he yelled. "Look, I'm President now!"

Stolidly, Jim Briskin came toward him.

"I'm not going to be winding no ball of string," Max said. "Or making model boats, nuthin like that." He shook hands warmly with Briskin. "I thank you," Max said. "For your congratulations."

"Congratulations," Briskin said, then, in a low voice.

"Thanks," Max said, squeezing the man's hand until the knuckles creaked. "Of course, sooner or later they'll get that noise-box patched up and I'll just be stand-by again. But—" He grinned gleefully around at all of them; the corridor was full of people now, from TV to White House

staff members to Army officers and Secret Servicemen.

Briskin said, "You have a big task, Mr. Fischer."

"Yeah," Max agreed.

Something in Briskin's eyes said: *And I wonder if you can handle it. I wonder if you're the man to hold such power.*

"Surely I can do it," Max declared, into Briskin's microphone, for all the vast audience to hear.

"Possibly you can," Jim Briskin said, and on his face was dubiousness.

"Hey, you don't like me any more," Max said. "How come?"

Briskin said nothing, but his eyes flickered.

"Listen," Max said, "I'm President now; I can close down your silly network—I can send FBI men in any time I want. For your information I'm firing the Attorney General right now, whatever his name is, and putting in a man I know, a man I can trust."

Briskin said, "I see." And now he looked less dubious; conviction, of a sort which Max could not fathom, began to appear instead. "Yes," Jim Briskin said, "you have the authority to order that, don't you? *If you're really President . . .*"

"Watch out," Max said. "You're nothing compared to me, Briskin, even if you do have that great big audience." Then, turn-

ing his back on the cameras, he strode through the open door, into the NSC bunker.

HOURS later, in the early morning, down in the National Security Council subsurface bunker, Maximilian Fischer listened sleepily to the TV set in the background as it yammered out the latest news. By now, intelligence sources had plotted the arrival of thirty more alien ships in the Sol System. It was believed that seventy in all had entered. Each was being continually tracked.

But that was not enough, Max knew. Sooner or later he would have to give the order to attack the alien ships. He hesitated. After all, who were they? Nobody at CIA knew. How strong were they? Not known either. And—would the attack be successful?

And then there were domestic problems. Unicephalon had continually tinkered with the economy, priming it when necessary, cutting taxes, lowering interest rates . . . that had ceased with the problem-solver's destruction. Jeez, Max thought dismally. What do I know about unemployment? I mean, how can I tell what factories to reopen and where?

He turned to General Tompkins, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who sat beside

him examining a report on the scrambling of the tactical defensive ships protecting Earth. "They got all them ships distributed right?" he asked Tompkins.

"Yes, Mr. President," General Tompkins answered.

Max winced. But the general did not seem to have spoken ironically; his tone had been respectful. "Okay," Max murmured. "Glad to hear that. And you got all that missile cloud up so there're no leaks, like you let in that ship to blast Unicephalon. I don't want that to happen again."

"We're under Defcon one," General Tompkins said. "Full war footing, as of six o'clock, our time."

"How about those strategic ships?" That, he had learned, was the euphemism for their offensive strike-force.

"We can mount an attack at any time," General Tompkins said, glancing down the long table to obtain the assenting nods of his co-workers. "We can take care of each of the seventy invaders now within our system."

With a groan, Max said, "Anybody got any bicarb?" The whole business depressed him. What a lot of work and sweat, he thought. All this goddam agitation—why don't the buggers just leave our system? I mean, do we *have* to get into a war? No telling what their home system will

do in retaliation; you never can tell about unhuman life forms—they're unreliable.

"That's what bothers me," he said aloud. "Retaliation." He sighed.

General Tompkins said, "Negotiation with them evidently is impossible."

"Go ahead, then," Max said. "Go give it to them." He looked about for the bicarb.

"I think you're making a wise choice," General Tompkins said, and, across the table, the civilian advisors nodded in agreement.

"Here's an odd piece of news," one of the advisors said to Max. He held out a teletype dispatch. "James Briskin has just filed a writ of *mandamus* against you in a Federal Court in California, claiming you're not legally President because you didn't run for office."

"You mean because I didn't get voted in?" Max said. "Just because of that?"

"Yes sir. Briskin is asking the Federal Courts to rule on this, and meanwhile he has announced his own candidacy."

"WHAT?"

"Briskin claims not only that you must run for office and be voted in, but you must run against him. And with his popularity he evidently feels—"

"Aw nuts," Max said in despair. "How do you like that?"

No one answered.

"Well anyhow," Max said, "it's all decided; you military fellas go ahead and knock out those alien ships. And meanwhile—" He decided there and then. "We'll put economic pressure on Jim-Jam's sponsors, that Reinlander beer and Calbest Electronics, to get him not to run."

The men at the long table nodded. Papers rattled as briefcases were put away; the meeting—temporarily—was at an end.

He's got an unfair advantage, Max said to himself. How can I run when it's not equal, him a famous TV personality and me not? That's not right; I can't allow that.

Jim-Jam can run, he decided, *but it won't do him any good*. He's not going to beat me because he's not going to be alive that long.

A WEEK before the election, Telscan, the interplanetary public-opinion sampling agency, published its latest findings. Reading them, Maximilian Fischer felt more gloomy than ever.

"Look at this," he said to his cousin Leon Lait, the lawyer whom he had recently made Attorney General. He tossed the report to him.

His own showing of course was negligible. In the election,

Briskin would easily, and most definitely, win.

"Why is that?" Lait asked. Like Max, he was a large, paunchy man who for years now had held a stand-by job; he was not used to physical activity of any sort and his new position was proving difficult for him. However, out of family loyalty to Max, he remained. "Is that because he's got all those TV stations?" he asked, sipping from his can of beer.

Max said cuttingly, "Naw, it's because his navel glows in the dark. Of course it's because of his TV stations, you jerk—he's got them pounding away night and day, creatin' an *image*." He paused, moodily. "He's a clown. It's that red wig; it's fine for a newscaster, but not for a President." Too morose to speak, he lapsed into silence.

And worse was to follow.

At nine p.m. that night, Jim-Jam Briskin began a seventy-two hour marathon TV program over all his stations, a great final drive to bring his popularity over the top and insure his victory.

In his special bedroom at the White House, Max Fischer sat with a tray of food before him, in bed, gloomily facing the TV set.

That Briskin, he thought furiously for the millionth time. "Look," he said to his cousin; the Attorney General sat in the easy

chair across from him. "There's the nert now." He pointed to the TV screen.

Leon Lait, munching on his cheeseburger, said, "It's abominable."

"You know where he's broadcasting from? Way out in deep space, out past Pluto. At their furthest-out transmitter, which your FBI guys will never in a million years manage to get to."

"They will," Leon assured him. "I told them they *have* to get him—the President, my cousin, personally says so."

"But they won't get him for a while," Max said. "Leon, you're just too damn slow. I'll tell you something. I got a ship of the line out there, the *Dwight D. Eisenhower*. It's all ready to lay an egg on them, you know, a big bang, just as soon as I pass on the word."

"Right, Max."

"And I hate to," Max said.

THE telecast had begun to pick up momentum already. Here came the Spotlights, and sauntering out onto the stage pretty Peggy Jones, wearing a glittery bare-shoulder gown, her hair radiant. Now we get a top-flight striptease, Max realized, by a real fine-looking girl. Even he sat up and took notice. Well, maybe not a true striptease, but certainly the opposition, Briskin and his staff, had sex working

for them, here. Across the room his cousin the Attorney General had stopped munching his chesseburger; the noise came to a halt, then picked up slowly once more.

On the screen, Peggy sang:

It's Jim-Jam, for whom I
am,

America's best-loved guy.

It's Jim-Jam, the best one
that am,

The candidate for you and I.

"Oh god," Max groaned. And yet, the way she delivered it, with every part of her slim, long body . . . it was okay. "I guess I got to inform the *Dwight D. Eisenhower* to go ahead," he said, watching.

"If you say so, Max," Leon said. "I assure you, I'll rule that you acted legally; don't worry none about that."

"Gimme the red phone," Max said. "That's the armored connection that only the commander-in-Chief uses for top-secret instructions. Not bad, huh?" He accepted the phone from the Attorney General. "I'm calling General Tompkins and he'll relay the order to the ship. Too bad, Briskin," he added, with one last look at the screen. "But it's your own fault; you didn't have to do what you did, opposing me and all."

The girl in the silvery dress had gone, now, and Jim-Jam Briskin had appeared in her place. Momentarily, Max waited.

"Hi, beloved comrades," Briskin said, raising his hands for silence; the canned applause—Max knew that no audience existed in that remote spot—lowered, then rose again. Briskin grinned amiably, waiting for it to die.

"It's a fake," Max grunted. "Fake audience. They're smart, him and his staff. His rating's already way up."

"Right, Max," the Attorney General agreed. "I noticed that."

"Comrades," Jim Briskin was saying soberly on the TV screen, "as you may know, originally President Maximilian Fischer and I got along very well."

His hand on the red phone, Max thought to himself that what Jim-Jam said was true.

"Where we broke," Briskin continued, "was over the issue of force—of the use of naked, raw power. To Max Fischer, the office of President is merely a machine, an instrument, which he can use as an extension of his own desires, to fulfill his own needs. I honestly believe that in many respects his aims are good; he is trying to carry out Unicephalon's fine policies. But as to the means. That's a different matter."

Max said, "Listen to him, Leon." And he thought, No matter what he says I'm going to keep on; nobody is going to stand in my way, because it's my duty; it's the job of the office,

and if you got to be President like I am you'd do it, too.

"Even the President," Briskin was saying, "must obey the law; he doesn't stand outside it, however powerful he is." He was silent for a moment and then he said slowly, "I know that at this moment the FBI, under direct orders from Max Fischer's appointee, Leon Lait, is attempting to close down these stations, to still my voice. Here again Max Fischer is making use of power, of the police agency, for his own ends, making it an extension—"

Max picked up the red phone. At once a voice said from it, "Yes, Mr. President. This is General Tompkins' C of C."

"What's that?" Max said.

"Chief of Communications, Army 600-1000, sir. Aboard the *Dwight D. Eisenhower*, accepting relay through the transmitter at the Pluto Station."

"Oh yeah," Max said, nodding. "Listen, you fellas stand by, you understand? Be ready to receive instructions." He put his hand over the mouthpiece of the phone. "Leon," he said to his cousin, who had now finished his cheeseburger and was starting on a strawberry shake. "How can I do it? I mean, Briskin is telling the truth."

Leon said, "Give Tompkins the word." He belched, then tapped himself on the chest with the side of his fist. "Pardon me."

ON the screen Jim Briskin said, "I think very possibly I'm risking my life to speak to you, because this we must face: we have a President who would not mind employing murder to obtain his objectives. This is the political tactic of a tyranny, and that's what we're seeing, a tyranny coming into existence in our society, replacing the rational, disinterested rule of the homeostatic problem-solving Unicephalon 40-D which was designed, built and put into operation by some of the finest minds we have ever seen, minds dedicated to the preservation of all that's worthy in our tradition. And the transformation from this to a one-man tyranny is melancholy, to say the least."

Quietly, Max said, "Now I can't go ahead."

"Why not?" Leon said.

"Didn't you hear him? He's talking about *me*. I'm the tyrant he has reference to. Keerist." Max hung up the red phone. "I waited too long."

"It's hard for me to say it," Max said, "but—well, hell, it would prove he's right." I know he's right anyhow, Max thought. But do *they* know it? Does the public know it? I can't let them find out about me, he realized. They should look up to their President, respect him. Honor him. No wonder I show up so bad in the Telscan poll. No wonder

Jim Briskin decided to run against me the moment he heard I was in office. They really do know about me; they sense it, sense that Jim-Jam is speaking the truth. I'm just not Presidential caliber.

I'm not fit, he thought, to hold this office.

"Listen, Leon," he said, "I'm going to give it to that Briskin anyhow and then step down. It'll be my last official act." Once more he picked up the red phone. "I'm going to order them to wipe out Briskin and then someone else can be President. Anyone the people want. Even Pat Noble or you; I don't care." He jiggled the phone. "Hey, C. of C.," he said loudly. "Come on, answer." To his cousin he said, "Leave me some of that shake; it's actually half mine."

"Sure, Max," Leon said loyally.

"Isn't no one there?" Max said into the phone. He waited. The phone remained dead. "Something's gone wrong," he said to Leon. "Communications have busted down. It must be those aliens again."

And then he saw the TV screen. It was blank.

"What's happening?" Max said. "What are they doing to me? *Who's* doing it?" He looked around, frightened. "I don't get it."

Leon stoically drank the milk-

shake, shrugging to show that he had no answer. But his beefy face had paled.

"It's too late," Max said. "For some reason it's just too late." Slowly, he hung up the phone. "I've got enemies, Leon, more powerful than you or me. And I don't even know who they are." He sat in silence, before the dark, soundless TV screen. Waiting.

THE speaker of the TV set said abruptly, "Pseudo-autonomic news bulletin. Stand by, please." Then again there was silence.

Jim Briskin, glancing at Ed Fineberg and Peggy, waited.

"Comrade citizens of the United States," the flat, unmodulated voice from the TV speaker said, all at once. "The interregnum is over, the situation has returned to normal." As it spoke, words appeared on the monitor screen, a ribbon of printed tape passing slowly across, before the TV cameras in Washington, D.C. Unicephalon 40-D had spliced itself into the co-ax in its usual fashion; it had pre-empted the program in progress: that was its traditional right.

The voice was the synthetic verbalizing-organ of the homeostatic structure itself.

"The election campaign is nullified," Unicephalon 40-D said. "That is item one. The stand-by President Maximilian Fischer is

cancelled out; that is item two. Item three: we are at war with the aliens who have invaded our system. Item four. James Briskin, who has been speaking to you—"

This is it, Jim Briskin realized.

In his earphones the impersonal, plateau-like voice continued, "Item four. James Briskin, who has been speaking to you on these facilities, is hereby ordered to cease and desist, and a writ of *mandamus* is issued forthwith requiring him to show just cause why he should be free to pursue any further political activity. In the public interest we instruct him to become politically silent."

Grinning starkly at Peggy and Ed Fineberg, Briskin said, "That's it. It's over. I'm to politically shut up."

"You can fight it in the courts," Peggy said at once. "You can take it all the way up to the Supreme Court; they've set aside decisions of Unicephalon in the past." She put her hand on his shoulder, but he moved away. "Or do you want to fight it?"

"At least I'm not cancelled out," Briskin said. He felt tired. "I'm glad to see that machine back in operation," he said, to reassure Peggy. "It means a return to stability. *That* we can use."

"What'll you do, Jim-Jam?"

Ed asked. "Go back to Reinlander beer and Calbest Electronics and try to get your old job back?"

"No," Briskin murmured. Certainly not that. But— he could not really become politically silent; he could not do what the problem-solver said. It simply was not biologically possible for him; sooner or later he would begin to talk again, for better or worse. And, he thought, I'll bet Max can't do what it says either . . . neither of us can.

Maybe, he thought, I'll answer the writ of *mandamus*; maybe I'll contest it. A counter suit . . . I'll sue Unicephalon 40-D in a court of law. Jim-Jam Briskin the plaintiff, Unicephalon 40-D the defendant. He smiled. I'll need a good lawyer for that. Someone quite a bit better than Max Fischer's top legal mind, cousin Leon Lait.

GOING to the closet of the small studio in which they had been broadcasting, he got his coat and began to put it on. A long trip lay ahead of them back to Earth from this remote spot, and he wanted to get started.

Peggy, following after him, said, "You're not going back on the air *at all*? Not even to finish the program?"

"No," he said.

"But Unicephalon will be cutting back out again, and what'll

that leave? Just dead air. That's not right, is it, Jim? Just to walk out like this . . . I can't believe you'd do it, it's not like you."

He halted at the door of the studio. "You heard what it said. The instructions it handed out to me."

"Nobody leaves dead air going," Peggy said. "It's a vacuum, Jim, the thing nature abhors. *And if you don't fill it, someone else will.* Look, Unicephalon is going back off right now." She pointed at the TV monitor. The ribbon of words had ceased; once more the screen was dark, empty of motion and light. "It's your responsibility," Peggy said, "and you know it."

"Are we back on the air?" he asked Ed.

"Yes. It's definitely out of the circuit, at least for a while." Ed gestured toward the vacant stage on which the TV cameras and lights focussed. He said nothing more; he did not have to.

With his coat still on, Jim Briskin walked that way. Hands in his pockets he stepped back into the range of the cameras, smiled and said, "I think, beloved comrades, the interruption is over. For the time being, anyhow. So . . . let's continue."

The noise of canned applause—manipulated by Ed Fineberg—swelled up, and Jim Briskin raised his hands and signalled

the nonexistent studio audience for silence.

"Does any of you know a good lawyer?" Jim-Jam asked caustically. "And if you do, phone us and tell us right away—before the FBI finally manages to reach us out here."

* * *

In his bedroom at the White House, as Unicephalon's message ended, Maximilian Fischer turned to his cousin Leon and said, "Well, I'm out of office."

"Yeah, Max," Leon said heavily. "I guess you are."

"And you, too," Max pointed out. "It's going to be a clean sweep; you can count on that. Cancelled." He gritted his teeth. "That's sort of insulting. It could have said *retired*."

"I guess that's just its way of expressing itself," Leon said. "Don't get upset, Max; remember your heart trouble. You still got the job of stand-by, and that's the top stand-by position there is, Stand-by President of the United States, I want to remind you. And now you've got all this worry and effort off your back; you're lucky."

"I wonder if I'm allowed to finish this meal," Max said, picking at the food in the tray before him. His appetite, now that he was retired, began almost at once to improve; he selected a chicken salad sandwich and took a big bite from it. "It's still

mine," he decided, his mouth full. "I still get to live here and eat regularly—right?"

"Right," Leon agreed, his legal mind active. "That's in the contract the union signed with Congress; remember back to that? We didn't go out on strike for nothing."

"Those were the days," Max said. He finished the chicken salad sandwich and returned to the eggnog. It felt good not to have to make big decisions; he let out a long, heartfelt sigh and settled back into the pile of pillows propping him up.

But then he thought, in some respects I sort of enjoyed making decisions. I mean, it was—he searched for the thought. It was different from being a stand-by or drawing unemployment. It had—

Satisfaction, he thought. That's what it gave me. Like I was accomplishing something. He missed that already; he felt suddenly hollow, as if things had all at once become purposeless.

"Leon," he said, "I could have gone on as President another whole month. And enjoyed the job. You know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I guess I get your meaning," Leon mumbled.

"No you don't," Max said.

"I'm trying, Max," his cousin said. "Honest."

With bitterness, Max said, "I shouldn't have had them go ahead

and let those engineer-fellas patch up that Unicephalon; I should have buried the project, at least for six months."

"Too late to think about that now," Leon said.

Is it? Max asked himself. You know, something could *happen* to Unicephalon 40-D. An accident.

He pondered that as he ate a piece of green-apple pie with a wide slice of longhorn cheese. A number of persons whom he knew could pull off such tasks . . . and did so, now and then.

A big, nearly-fatal accident, he thought. Late some night, when everyone's asleep and it's just me and it awake here in the White House. I mean, let's face it; the aliens showed us how.

"Look, Jim-Jam Briskin's back on the air," Leon said, gesturing at the TV set. Sure enough, there was the famous, familiar red wig, and Briskin was saying something witty and yet profound, something that made one stop to ponder. "Hey listen," Leon said. "He's poking fun at the FBI; can you imagine him doing that *now*? He's not scared of anything."

"Don't bother me," Max said. "I'm thinking." He reached over and carefully turned the sound of the TV set off.

For thoughts such as he was having he wanted no distractions.

THE END

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

the Prince of Liars

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

THERE are some tales that become legends in a magazine's history, that appear consistently on collector's lists of "best" stories, yet which never are reprinted. Such a tale is *The Prince of Liars* by L. Taylor Hansen. The most probable reason it has not been republished is its length. Anthologists try to get as many stories as they can into a book and shorter units are preferred. Another reason is the lack of fame on the part of the author, who is not a "big name." Anthologists want as impressive a list of famous storytellers as possible. The good story is sometimes slightly shaded by the very good name.

When this story was published in the Oct., 1930 issue of *AMAZING STORIES*, it was only three years since Edward E. Smith's *Sky-lark of Space* had burst the cocoon that confined science fiction

adventures to the solar system and extended its range to the entire galaxy. While E. E. Smith and his followers were exploring the galaxy with their new "super science," L. Taylor Hansen was utilizing many of the same Einsteinian concepts to explore their implications for earth's history! After all, the natural laws that Einstein had so recently discovered, were new only to modern man. These "laws" had always existed and any intelligent race, in the long history of the universe, would have to take them into account.

The space traveler who arrives on earth is a galley slave from ancient Greece, bizarrely allied with an interstellar civilization 6,000 years ago. The Time-Dilatation effect, which L. Ron Hubbard used as a basis for a "modern" classic in *To the Stars*, is utilized in this story as a par-

tial explanation of a man who has been revisiting the earth at intervals for 60 centuries!

The most enthralling and far-fetched notions are met head on by the author and logically explained. In fact, some of Einstein's theories, when clearly interpreted, seem far more imagi-

native than most science fiction story lines we read today. This is not to say that flaws may not be found in the reasoning. But the author was courageously building upon the most advanced theories of his time with all the understanding and extrapolation within his/her command.



Illustrated by PAUL

Those readers who read my introductory remarks to the reprint of L. Taylor Hansen's story, The Undersea Tube, in the May, 1961, issue of AMAZING STORIES, know that there is still some question as to whether or not this story was written by the woman who hides behind the first

initial (L. Louise); or whether she was merely the agent of a learned brother. The prodigious effort to present a tale possessing all those qualities of wonder which seem to be missing out of so much of today's science fiction is not, however, open to question.

FOREWORD

Have You Read Einstein?

PERHAPS it was this embarrassing question which is thrust upon one from every angle in scientific circles; or perhaps it was the suspicion that for a theory which is supposed to be so incomprehensible that only twelve men in the world can really grasp it, and of these twelve not one knows who the eleven are, it is humorously said. Relativity has certainly stirred up an astounding number of arguments among the ranks of the physicists, or perhaps it was the reflection that since it would be remarkable to find minds as different, and backgrounds, trainings, temperaments and nationalities as divergent as those of Cunningham, Lorentz, Borel, Birkhoff, Eddington, Weyl, Hevesy, Lodge and Slosson, for instance, agreeing about the most obvious of questions, it would be nothing short of a miracle to discover that they agree as well as they do on the fundamental pre-

cepts of Relativity, if we must believe that they do not really understand the points under discussion in the first place: or perhaps it was a combination of these facts which made me suspect that Einstein is somewhat better understood by the scientists than we have been led to believe. However, I do not mean to insinuate that, because of this suspicion, I decided to write a treatise upon Relativity in the form of a scientific fiction story, or that I am setting myself down as another interpreter of his genius. Indeed, no. On the contrary, I urge every man who can beg, borrow or steal the time, to go to the public library and become acquainted with this riot of debate that is sweeping the ranks of our scientists. Einstein's own book, or rather abstract, is almost unreadable, being a sort of shorthand of higher mathematics, but there are plenty of others, one of the most delightful of which, perhaps, is "Einstein and the Universe," by Nordmann.

At first your mind will be, no doubt, a battleground of ideas. Some set theories are dragged out and shot during the conflict, and their ghosts are hard to bury. And yet, Einstein gives us so much more in their place that we are well compensated for their loss. He puts the word "impossible" with definite directness into the language of science, and yet his possibilities are so much more interesting—as for instance, when he is reported to have said that it is quite impossible for a moving body ever to attain a velocity greater than that of light, because it is scientifically inconceivable, but, on the other hand, it is conceivable, and therefore within the range of possibility, that man may yet fly to the most distant constellations.

Then as the great structure of this new physics begins to take shape, you may experience some of that feeling of awe which came to me and gave the inspiration for this story. And if this little tale, treating, as it must, only one phase of that mighty structure, has any charm, it is because Einstein's conception is so magnificent that, though one is grounded to reality, yet one seems to be listening to the harmony of the stars.

Indeed, as his friend and admirer, Minkowski, so well describes that impression:

"We are familiar with the Wanderer Fantasie of Schubert, its tonal disposition is realistic, conforming to nature, yet its general expression is transcendental—and so is a ramble with Einstein. . . ."

The Prince of Liars

I MIGHT just as easily have called this tale "Speaking of Einstein," though I do not mean to suggest by this that Einstein is a liar. However, my transformation from a skeptical Newtonian to a radical Relativist was accomplished by a man who, though he cheerfully admitted he had sometimes been called "The Prince of Liars," yet gained his point not by arguing relativity in the ordinary fashion, but by telling me a wild yarn which, even in my sanest moments, I am more than half inclined to believe. But I am anticipating . . .

I do not know that I would have ever met Dr. Smead if it had not been for his watch-charm, which was shaped like a miniature sun and glowed in the dark. It was night when I first saw him. I was feeling my way through the damp blindness of a London fog, guiding myself partly by instinct and partly by the diffused shimmer of the street lamps, when I saw his watch-charm approaching me like the glowing eye of a wounded tiger. After having lived a year in

tropical jungles, it gives one a start to see a small light coming noiselessly out of the dark. Perhaps that is why I unhesitatingly bumped into him and profusely begged his pardon, in order to get a closer examination of the uncanny little light. And yet when I looked up into his seared face with its livid scar that slanted crosswise over the forehead, twisted the corner of one eye and divided the right cheek into pieces, my confident voice petered out lamely, and with a confused murmur I hurried on.

I do not know why, but that face haunted me. I had seen faces before that were terribly scarred, but this one was different. Sorrow and suffering were mingled in those eyes—they were eyes of a man who has gone through more and has seen more than one mortal should have experienced and seen.

Therefore I do not believe that I would have quickly forgotten the incident, even if two evenings later, at the reception of the Peruvian Ambassador, I had not seen him again. But coming as it did, so soon after our first meeting, the sight of that face was like the realization of a nightmare. Hurriedly I sought a South American diplomat with whom I was slightly acquainted, and pointed him out.

"That man is an interesting mystery to us all," he murmured

with a smile, "perhaps because he seems to have no country and is rather amusingly afflicted with hallucinations."

"Hallucinations?"

"Yes. Among other things, I understand that he claims to have lived through past centuries and upon other planets. Sometimes I think he is crazy and then, again, I think he is an expert liar."

"You know, I could almost say that he looks the part."

"The psychopathic experts say he is harmless."

"Have you ever noticed his watch-charm?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

"Being a geologist, it interests me. You haven't heard any stories about it, I presume?"

"No—I believe not. He has had a good deal of fun poked at him, but if you ask him seriously straight out, I do not doubt that you will get some wild explanation concerning it. Would you like to meet him?"

"Very much, indeed."

AND so it was arranged. I found him a most fascinating companion, well educated and well traveled, though no mention was made of other countries or strange planets. In fact, knowing that one must always pilot the insane away from the subjects which are their weaknesses, I avoided both of these, finding

plenty of material for mutual interest among the adventures in out-of-the-way places, in which he could not only match my own varied and hazardous life, but even best it. I reflected, it is true, upon his reputation for the unusual, but dismissed my reflections with the thought that if he was a liar, he was indeed the most ingenious and entertaining liar I had ever encountered. And that was a compliment, whether he would have considered it such or not.

Perhaps he thought the same thing about me. I do not know. But at any rate, he was kind enough to invite me to his apartment the following evening, and I was not at all slow in accepting the invitation.

It occurred to me as I was seated on the trolley car the following night, that like my South American friend, I had not placed the man's features nor his slight accent, though I could have sworn he was neither an Englishman nor an American. But I dismissed the thought with a shrug a moment later, as I alighted and turned down the street toward the address he had given me.

The smell of an exotic incense hung like an aura over his mellowsly lighted bachelor quarters as I followed a bowing Hindu through a maze of silky Oriental rugs and strange drapes to a

cozy library where a log fire was crackling on the hearth. It was obviously the apartment of a rover, being filled with the oddities which one picks up in various corners of the earth. A stone god from Yucatan frowned at a coolie hat on the opposite wall, while a fat green Buddha of unfathomable age sat smilingly upon an equally curious Navajo rug, carrying the symbol of the double cross with a fringe of the Greek motif. I carried the memory of that rug for several moments, intending to mention the strange resemblance of ancient symbols, whether found in the Old World or the New.

"Master will be ready in a moment," the Hindu murmured as he motioned me to a divan of odd design and slipped away.

I sank back in the cushions and looked around at his library, at the fireplace, and the table which, strewn carelessly with a few volumes of various sizes, was emphasized mainly because the light from the floor-lamp streamed over it. From where I sat I could read some of the titles of these chosen works—Newton's *Principia*, Einstein's *Special and General Theories*, Pliny's *Lives*, Aristotle, Poincaré, Kant and Virgil were heaped there in confusion. Turned the other way, a large volume of interesting age lay open, its yellow leaves reflecting the lamplight.

ALL around the room were book shelves, except one large open space where a huge life-sized painting covered the wall. It was to my back and in the shadow, but I saw immediately that it was the most arresting object in the room. Not only was it masterfully executed with a richness of tone that was reminiscent of Rembrandt, but the subject nearly pulled my breath from my throat, for though I looked upon what appeared to be a Roman galley slave, chained to his bench, drooping with toil and marked with the stripes of the driver's whip, yet the face was strangely familiar. As if drawn by an invisible force, I got up and turned all the way around while I stared at those tired, anguished eyes from which hope seemed to have died. Then suddenly, as if with a wave of cold horror, I recognized him. It was the same face I had stared into that night of the London fog, the same except for one thing—this man in the picture bore no terrible scar upon his face.

"You are startled at the likeness?"

I whirled back to face the doorway, where he stood with a faint smile of amusement upon his lips, the upper part of his cloven cheek shining slightly.

"Not startled," I corrected him, "just positively shocked.

You make a most excellent model."

"Yes, even better than you imagine."

There was a trace of bitterness in the words which I could not account for at the moment.

"Who painted it?" I asked, taking my seat again.

"It is my own work. I do not claim to be an artist, however. Painting is simply a minor avocation of mine."

I stared in puzzled unbelief as he crossed the room and sank into the cushions beside me. I was being uncomfortably reminded by my reason that such a masterpiece means a background of intense study and hard work. The painting was too good for the brush of an amateur. Again I looked at his face, thought of all the adventure tales he had told me and their suggested years of travel—and remembered the hallucinations. His face was not that of an old man. With the uncertain light of the fire playing over it, I judged it was within ten years of fifty, the age when, according to their works, men usually reach their intellectual prime. Of course he might have painted it. But when had he found time to travel and to study science, as I found he seemed to know it in almost all of its branches? Yes, frankly, when had he found time for it all in the short span of fifty years?

My face must have reflected some of these thoughts, for he leaned back in the cushions and laughed.

"You think I'm a great liar, don't you?"

"Excellent," I admitted.

"Why? Because of the painting?"

"Certainly. I do not say that you are a genius, or that you are not. For convenience we will say that you are, but you are also a student and a rover, and even genius must learn to handle its tools."

"True. Very true. And I have studied many years under masters of whose existence you have but little conception. The chemistry of my paints also . . . they will not fade with the years."

"I know a little of the principal great living teachers."

"Of this earth, yes. But we live upon such a tiny atom of space. The artistic instinct is not confined to mankind."

"Surely," I nodded, wondering if I had not better change the subject.

A faint smile flitted for a moment over his lips as he glanced from my eyes back to the fire. But somehow, I could not look away from him. No wonder my friend had called him an interesting mystery! Almost without realizing it, I stared at him thoughtfully, while he leaned back in the cushions and twirled

that little watch-charm on the tips of his fingers. I remembered my interest in the glowing stone and decided to ask him about it.

"You know the psychologists say that curiosity is the driving power of the scientific mind," I began somewhat lamely, and then taking courage as he glanced back into my eyes with a friendly smile, "it is fairly lashing mine. I mean the watch-charm. Where in the world did you get it?"

"I remember, you did tell me that you were a geologist. Would you be startled if I were to tell you that it is a substance originally extra-terrestrial?"

"You mean a meteorite?"

"No. Unlike a meteorite, it was not brought from elsewhere and into the attraction of this planet by chance."

"I do not understand," I smiled as evenly as possible.

"It came into my possession long ago—very long ago as you reckon time. By the way, are you a relativist?"

"No, a Newtonian. I believe in the absolute values of time and space." I smiled, glancing at his volumes of Einstein.

"Do you mean to say that you think time has the same value here on our little planet as it has, say, on Sirius, where the density is greater?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, then, as a scientist, let me remind you that though the

driving power of the scientific mind may be curiosity, its greatest asset is suspended judgment."

"We are all subject to prejudices of one type or another."

"I admit that. And yet, as we grow up intellectually, they tend to dwindle. For instance, we have gone beyond the dog, who having learned that there is such a thing as property, suspects everyone of being a thief. But, on the other hand, having learned to measure time with clocks, mankind is still suspicious of anyone who could suggest such a thing as the elasticity of time. It was not long ago that they felt the same way about mass"

BUT what has Einstein and his theories to do with the watch-charm?"

"I am coming to that. In the first place, let us thrash out between us this matter of time, or we simply cannot understand each other at all."

"All right, go ahead," I grinned, settling down for a good argument.

"Do you admit that in this space-time continuum, in which we find ourselves at present, we make use of time to measure every event and experiment?"

"Yes, that is true."

"Now we measure events in three dimensions of space also, do we not?"

"Yes, that is also true."

"And since we measure events in the three dimensions of space and the one dimension of time, time must of necessity become our fourth measure or our fourth dimension. Put out of your mind all thoughts to the effect that we can therefore travel through it, or other nonsense. I am simply naming it as the fourth measure which we use daily in all of our conversation."

"Certainly we make use of it, but that does not make it a dimension," I countered. "Time might just as easily be thought of as an illusion. For instance, if we want to name the place where the coronation of George III of England took place, we must, you say, not only find the spot through the three dimensions of space on our globe, but we must also go back through the dimension of time in order to point out the exact spot in space, since the earth as well as the entire solar system has moved a great distance in the meantime?"

"Yes, of course."

"But I say, not at all."

"And why not?"

"Because, if from the Newtonian point of view, seated somewhere in the heavens a privileged observer in space could know to a needle-point just how far the earth has moved around the sun, and the sun has moved in the, or rather with reference to, the

Milky Way, and how far that has moved in respect to other island universes, etc. . . . etc. . . . he would find that spot, would he not, without bothering about time?"

"An interesting conception," he smiled. "But since we are not off in space and do not have all that interesting information, we must measure time, and continue to make use of it as a dimension."

"However, my point is that this is only because we have limitations."

"Certainly. Every observer has his own limitations, and therefore his own point of view. An observer on Mars would have his limitations and an observer on Arcturus would have still others. And I might say that the Newtonian point of view has its limitations."

"For instance?"

"Physicists have lived on earth for so long that they cannot get off of it, even in thought, long enough to see that there is no set standard of measurement. Earth-time and earth-space need not be the same as the time and space on Vega, Saturn or even Venus. Suppose, for example, that some mischievous wizard decided to fool mankind by lengthening out one ordinary day, so that it would last a thousand years. If all clocks, all motions and all physical processes were also

lengthened in proportion, would we know the difference?"

"No, we probably wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because there would be no means of comparison."

"Then it is possible for time to be thought of as elastic?"

"But since we have no such ingenious wizard playing these pranks, we must continue to think of time as absolute."

"Are you sure?"

"I think so."

"And yet it was not so very long ago that mass was also considered a most dependable and unvarying measure, was it not? Physicists built theories and made experiments upon the stability of mass, didn't they?"

"Yes," I admitted with a smile.

EINSTEIN was considered a little mad because he thought mass would be found to vary with velocity. And what has happened? Men soon found that they had been mistaken about mass, because heretofore they had dealt only with very low velocities. But the beta particles of X-Rays having a very high velocity changed things, for their mass was found to increase in the measure predicted by the new physics.* Mass is not a constant."

"Even though I should grant

*Heveny Manual of Radio-Activity

this, yet we were talking about time," I reminded him. "And I still believe that time is a constant, as I believe in the absolute value of space."

"You are wrong. Time and space might both be warped by the presence of matter. In other words, taking one of these beach-resort mirrors which make us absurdly short, would you say that the measurement in that mirror was correct for the mirror?"

"Well, in the Land of the Looking Glass, measurements do seem to vary, according to the particular mirror under observation."

"And why? Because our measuring rods also vary according to the mirror."

"But of course we have the proper one beside us in the Land of Reality with which we can always correct the error in the Land of the Looking Glass."

"Ah, but that is just the point. We are using measurements that seem absolute, in our Land of Reality, but is it not possible that they are simply correct for us living here in a globe of a certain size and composition in the continuum of earth-time and earth-space? Euclidean geometry, in which only one line may be passed through a given point parallel to a given line, would not work on a curved surface. It is very possible to conceive of a

type of space in which one would use, not the geometry of Euclid, but rather that of Riemann."

"I do not follow you. Do you mean to say that there are worlds where we would be much shorter than we are here?"

"And furthermore we would not know it because our measuring stick would also be shorter."

"But as for time. . . ."

"I believe that I can illustrate my point better with a story."

"Great! I enjoy your stories—fantastic or not."

"This will be fantastic, all right. And yet, it is one that a relativist would say could be true."

"I have noticed, haven't you, that it is the tales which could be true, but probably are not, that make the best entertainment?"

"And the best liar of the narrator?"

"Absolutely! To tell the truth, I enjoy listening to a first-rate liar—the kind, I mean, that makes you believe him—for the moment."

"Am I to suspect that some of the yarns you have been telling me about the Amazon are. . . ."

I shrugged my shoulders indifferently.

"Why bother over minor details? Truth usually needs coloring. But I must warn you that even credulity such as mine has a vanishing point."

He laughed heartily at this.

"All right, I will try to keep away from that point, though I may as well admit, before beginning, that I have sometimes been called the Prince of Liars. However, I would rather have a frank doubter for a listener than an apparently agreeing hypocrite. You always know just where you stand with the doubter."

Then walking over to the buffet, he poured out two glasses of ale, remarking as he handed me one:

"To the man who admires a good liar! May he some day realize how fantastic the truth can be."

AS I swallowed the last gulp and pushed the empty glass toward Einstein's latest pamphlet, my host sank back in the cushions and spread out his hands to the fire.

"I will have to take you back a good many years."

"Two or three hundred?"

He gave me a sharp glance.

"No—even farther back. We will picture a warm, star-strewn night in ancient Greece on the shore of the Mediterranean in the year 522 B.C. Pythagoras, the unequalled, had just completed his most illuminating lecture on the solar system, and one of his younger students wandered in absorbed reverie with his eyes on the stars.

"Pythagoras was, as you know, the first man to discard the title 'Sophos,' meaning 'Wise man,' for the word 'Philosopher' or 'Lover of Wisdom.' Scientist—astronomer and mathematical genius—to mention only two of his fields; what a shame that the brilliance of his name has become clouded with superstition! But I forget that in the eternal struggle between knowledge and creed, the science of one millennium becomes black magic in the next, and is so disguised that when knowledge again gains the upper hand, it fails to recognize its own."

He filled his pipe thoughtfully and struck a match. The repeated flares, as the tobacco ignited, lit a face that for the moment seemed as old as that far off age—bitter with the futility of history's repeated failures and the blind stupidity of mankind.

"As I say, it was a warm night," he continued at last. "The sea washed in quietly, and Gnostes, as we will call him, was too much absorbed with the thoughts which the master had just given him to notice that a boat had been beached noiselessly behind him. A moment later there was a fierce, wild struggle with bearded ruffians, who finally knocked their victim unconscious and rowed quickly out into the silent sea with him stretched on the bottom boards of the boat."

He blew a smoke ring thoughtfully toward the fire.

"It was not unusual in those days for rich young men to be kidnaped and held for ransom. We will suppose that the disappearance of this one became the sensation of the year, but that gossip at last burned itself out, and the society of the day finally began to look elsewhere for its sensations. And so the civilized world of Greece forgot the young scholar whose family, position and wealth have now been lost so long in the annals of time.

"And yet, though cut off forever from his world, the boy had not died. Shipwrecked again before the pirates could communicate about the ransom, and rescued by a trireme ship, whose brutal master, being short of slaves because of recent cruelties, chose to laugh at his story and chained him to the oar, the boy toughened into a steel-muscled youth—but his soul became—like that."

I shuddered almost involuntarily as I saw him nod toward the painting, which gleamed so lividly among the shadows.

"But hope dies hard. In spite of the cruelties of the slave-driver, the life was an out-of-door life. Also the work was hard and the food contained no softening elements. And so with renewed vigor in the body came a renewed desire for life—and

revenge. During the nights when the guards slept or made merry with wine, he began to rub the links of his chain until at last two of them became dangerously thin. Then he could laugh, for he was strong now. Finally his break came. The ship was sailing majestically into a new harbor, on whose shores gleamed a marble city, roselit in the sinking sun.

"Gnostes knew that this was one of the lands whose very existence had been held a trade secret by the men who held him in bondage, and he knew that this secret was more precious than the life of any slave. But this knowledge only made him the more determined to get away or die in the attempt—for he swore that they should never take him alive. Therefore he waited with increasing impatience, while he helped to pull the ship into the colorful harbor, passing dirty fishing boats and pleasure craft with silken sails, while his eyes roved furtively toward the banks where marble palaces caught the last rays of the reddened sun. The first night in a port was always a night of carousal, he remembered, as he clutched his portion of broth and watched the distorted sun drop into the jungle that yawned behind the Acropolis of the city. For the purpose of the story we shall call it the Port of De. Its real

name, like that of Gnostes, is meaningless today."

The sea-gray eyes of Dr. Smead held a far-away look as he stared at the coals of the fire. I could almost imagine that he was the slave holding that bowl of broth and glancing furtively toward the gleaming palaces that lined the waterfront.

"But fate had not arranged things quite as well as she might have done. Perhaps the youth was too impatient and could not wait until the liquor had entirely drugged away the watchful senses of the guards. Be that as it may, the splash of his body as he dropped over the side of the ship, was heard by someone who managed to gather together a few of the more sober revellers and start after him in pursuit.

"But they only pursued a slave while Gnostes swam for his life. Diving under water and coming up beside the slippery hull of one craft after another, he could always see the boat somewhere behind him—the occupants now dragging the water with nets as their bending shapes were silhouetted in the glow of the full moon, and again leaning far out to cut the water with their lances. Bits of wood tossed against his skin now and then and once a dead fish struck coldly against his face, but he swam on dodging and diving—always making for shore.

FINALLY he pulled himself up on the beach. No marble palaces were here. This was a poorer stretch; from the stench of salted fish he judged that it was used by the fishermen to dry their nets. One glance confirmed his guess, and he threw himself prone in the shadow of a boat, scarcely daring to breathe as he heard the scrape of the pursuing boat on the sands. For what seemed like hours, he crouched there listening. Someone had evidently seen him creep up on the shore for they were spread in a circle—a circle that kept closing in. At last he knew it was only a matter of time until he would be discovered, and so he determined to make a dash for safety. He had gotten his wind back, and even though his pursuers were not weary from their dash for shore, yet they were still probably a little dizzy from their celebration which he had interrupted, and he had at least an even chance of beating them for a short way. But where would he go? Then suddenly he remembered the red light of the sun as it touched the Acropolis. These people must have a temple of some kind. And if they had, he would be safe in the temple, for no matter what gods might be worshipped there, one of mankind's sensitive points was that he did not like to have his gods insulted by a murder committed

under their eyes. What happened outside, of course, did not matter.

"So suddenly he darted through the surprised searchers and dashed toward the city with the pack at his heels, following now in full cry. Jostling conversational groups and little cliques of bargaining merchants, he tore through the darkened streets of the city toward the Acropolis.

"He had succeeded at last in out-distancing his pursuers by a few hundred feet as he dragged himself, sobbing for breath, up the marble steps and across the mosaic floor of the temple. Lighted fitfully by the gleam of two torches on each side, sat the Goddess—a huge wooden image, which stared thoughtfully into space as she crouched there upon the outspread paws of a tiger. The strangest thing about her, perhaps was her eyes—for they seemed to be formed of miniature suns which glowed faintly in the semi-darkness.

GNOSTES had already staggered half-way across the floor, dragging one dripping leg after the other as if they were half-paralyzed, when he caught sight of a young woman in the shadow between the paws of the Goddess. In a dull sort of way, he realized that she was perhaps the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her long hair which

rippled about her was of deepest auburn, but in the turn of each curling ripple, it gleamed with dashes of golden flame. She turned and looked at him with eyes of pity. Gnostes knew then that if she was once won she would protect him, for she was surely not a coward. Her very grace of movement was that of a thoroughbred.

"Quickly he threw himself upon his knees—imploping her help with his eyes and his outstretched arms, as he heard the first triumphant shouts of his pursuers. They would reach the temple any moment. Desperately, he looked at her. For the fraction of a second her eyes measured him and then hearing the cry of the oncoming pack, she touched a hidden spring with her sandal and indicated a door that yawned suddenly between the paws of the Goddess. He stumbled forward into the opening—the door snapped shut behind him—leaving him in darkness. Then, after a moment of adjustment, he realized that the darkness was not utterly black. The light was still flickering in through a tiny peep-hole, and he turned stealthily around so that he might look out. She was kneeling before him, so close that he could almost touch her hair—that glorious sheen with its red-gold glints.

"Then like a flood they burst in and filled the temple—shout-

ing, jabbering, quarreling and cursing. She turned around and drew herself up imperiously. But apparently they had not even seen her, for they set about searching—peering into corners and running around the fluted columns. She held up a protecting arm, but they paid no attention. And then one of them, a short man with bristly red hair that covered him like a sparse fur, pointed to a wet spot upon the beautiful mosaic of the floor. It was the spot where but a moment before, Gnostes had kneeled before the auburn-haired priestess and held out his arms in his plea for protection. Now that very act, instead of saving him, had given him away. He looked at the little pool of muddy water as it gleamed in the torchlight, tracing each step toward his hiding place in those muddy footprints which had followed him like the merciless mark of fate. He groaned. Then a strange thing happened. The groan echoed and re-echoed throughout the temple in tremulous waves that sent the blood curdling up his spine. The girl with the auburn hair had hidden him in the talking-chamber of the Goddess!

BUT if the groan had made his blood curdle, it froze that of the men. Everyone had suddenly stiffened, with eyes almost popping from his head and hair

standing out like that of a Bushman. The little furry man stood there with loosened jaw, his knees fairly clattering together. The effect was so absurd that he had the mad desire to laugh, which he only succeeded in preventing after a few whispered snickers had burst through his fingers. Then once again came a demonstration of those echoes—only now they were magnified into sardonical laughter that whispered from wall to wall as if all the unseen spirits of the dark regions had gathered in the shadows to mock these human fools who had dared to defile the temple. This was too much for the superstitious traders. They fled in confused terror. Pushing, shoving and scratching, in their madness to get away from the haunted horror of that shadowy roof, they scattered into the night like frightened rabbits and Gnostes never saw one of them again. Thus the slave met the priestess Thora."

Smead had stopped smoking long ago, and now he was unaware that his pipe had gone out. With his strange sea-grey eyes upon the coals of the fire, he seemed to be staring at it as if he could conjure from those glowing galleries the features of that young woman of another age.

"Well?" I asked at last.

He started, as if from a dream.

OH, yes. I was telling you of Thora, wasn't I? It is hard to describe her mind and its tremendous storehouse of knowledge. She was unusually well educated, even for a priestess, this daughter of one of Egypt's high officials and a Celtic slave. Her understanding of the lore of Egypt was immense—lore that the world has long since lost. To Gnostes, in the weeks which followed, she taught not only her language but she also explained many of the things which to archaeologists of today are inexplicable—namely, the discoveries of shockingly accurate scientific knowledge among the ancients, side by side with childishly naïve superstitions. She revealed to him the closeness of that world which we of today think of as prehistoric. She disclosed the vast extent of ancient travel and the accurate knowledge of the earth's topography, which degenerated in the wars and disasters that followed, into trade secrets to be guarded with one's life. With a perspective that viewed the past by thousands of years, she pointed out the eternal struggle between the drive for knowledge, which is science, and the clinging to old beliefs and out-worn superstitions, which is creed. During one millennium science had forged ahead until the ignorant masses, which it had ignored, became

carried away by some new religion and made the world unsafe for knowledge unless employed in the service of the reigning creed. So the following millennium became again the dark ages of ignorance. Men no longer freely sailed the seas, fearing unknown terrors, while a few cities waxed rich in the light of certain "trade secrets." Learned masters, on the other hand, taught in secret and hid their discoveries. Religion again reigned supreme—whether the powerful Amen of Egypt or the Feathered Serpent of America. Yes, Thora knew about the golden cities of Peru. . . .

"So it was that choosing to serve science, she had been forced to serve creed. No one else but the priestly cast had any business searching for knowledge, you see. And Thora was tirelessly searching.

"One night as they were sitting in the upper chamber of the Goddess-image—a hidden chamber behind those strange glowing eyes where Thora had concealed Gnostes for weeks, she leaned over and touched his hand, whispering with a queer tenseness:

"There is something I must tell you. Prah, the head-priest of the Mahyak shrine, suspects your presence. If he finds you, it will be death for us both. They will bury me alive, and you they will boil in oil.'

"Gnostes tried to control his recoiling muscles.

"Do not fear. He will not find you. I have sent for the men of Allos. They arrive tonight."

"The men of Allos?"

"Yes. I was going to tell you of Allos in a less abrupt manner, but there is no time now. The fewer the words, the less we are apt to be discovered. Yet there are some things which you should know. I had hoped to lead you up to this knowledge gradually, but I must make every word count tonight." Gnostes nodded silently.

"I was captured long ago—it matters not how long ago, because you will learn the details later, and carried off to a distant planet. Our people had called it 'The Blue World,' though it had only come down to us in the most vague of legends. Once, it seems, the earthmen had communicated regularly with Allos, but something happened which destroyed the civilization on the earth. Perhaps it was a series of disasters, but I prefer to think it was a terrific raid of death from unknown beings. I mean from creatures that came to earth from somewhere out in space. The men of Allos found only smoking ruins on their next trip and so for a thousand years they did not return. When they did come back, it was to find that earth-men had again reverted to the condition of savages living in jungles

and so they were fated to call the disaster a mystery and would have, except for one thing. . . ."

"Gnostes was beginning to wonder if Thora had suddenly gone mad, though perhaps his training under the great Pythagoras had prepared his mind for the reception of strange ideas to a far greater degree than was the case with the minds of countless thousands of his fellows. Therefore instead of ridiculing the turn of her mind, he asked quietly:

"And what was it that gave them a clue to the solution of the mystery?"

"She smiled slowly—a strange, enigmatic smile.

"It was these stones," she said in a soft voice, touching the back of the image's eyes. 'It was these rocks—these rocks that do not come from our earth—these rocks that are shaped like miniature suns and which glow in the dark.'"

SMEAD was fingering his watch-charm as he said this, and again my eyes were drawn, as if by a magnet, to that curious bit of stone.

"These rocks were thought to be weapons perhaps, but that has never been proved definitely. . . ." She lingered a moment, with her fingers still on the stone, as if she were just on the point of disclosing a secret. But the secret

was locked up again behind her laughing, fearless eyes and she seated herself on the floor beside Gnostes, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"'As I said, I was carried off to Allos long ago. It is in fact, my home. I was educated there. On earth I am but an agent for the men of Allos, gathering all the knowledge I can, while I am here, and returning again. Now my time here is about up. Tonight I am going back to "The Blue World" with my report, and you are going back with me.'

"But to Gnostes this was wild and foolish talk. The important thing was that the head-priest had suspected his presence.

"'You know, Thora, I believe that the head-priest is in love with you,' Gnostes said.

"She threw back her head and laughed merrily.

"'Nonsense. He is simply jealous of my influence here. Until I came, he was all-powerful.'

"'And how did you come?'

"An impish smile played mischievously over her lips for a moment.

"'It was all very mysterious. The people here will tell you that one night strange rays of colored light shone down like many suns over the city, and the next morning I was found on this hill, holding the stones which were to become the eyes of the Tiger-Goddess.'

"'Of course some fools may tell such lies, for there are many fools in a city of this size, but you do not expect me to believe them, do you?'

"She shrugged her shoulders with a teasing smile.

"'Would you believe me if I were to tell you that on the Blue World, men have learned to talk by means of a thin copper string laid under the ground, and that because of this instrument, the voice of a child can be carried even as far as your own land?'

"'Absurd.'

"'Or that they have learned to record the voice of a singer so that after the performer has died, they can by means of another instrument, still hear his song if they so desire?'

"'Don't you think I have some adult intelligence, Thora? I am aware that such nonsense is utterly impossible.'

"'Or even more strange perhaps,' she continued with tantalizing indifference, "is the instrument by which they can send the human voice around the entire globe, or the instrument with which they can produce the human features on a blank wall . . .'

"'Thora, I am no child that I need to be entertained with fairy tales. I never in all my life heard such monstrous stories from the most fantastic of liars. I thought you had a higher opinion of my intelligence. In fact I . . .'

"A finger held up suddenly, cut his thoughts in two.

"Listen!" she whispered.

"A board creaked ominously in the hidden speaking chamber below them. He started to his feet but she put a forefinger over her lips. A stealthy movement now unmistakably from the lowest stair, caught his ear. She pointed to the glowing stone that formed the iris of the Image's strange eyes, and motioned for him to pry it out and give it to her. Again that stealthy movement, as if someone crept with silent menace up the stairs.

"Prah?" His lips formed the word soundlessly.

"She nodded and snuffed out the ancient oil torch, even as she pointed anxiously at the glowing stone. Gnostes was annoyed. What did she want to bother with them for at such a time as this? Of course these relics were valuable and interesting, and he remembered that she had hinted that they held some sort of secret, but after all. . . . Half-reluctantly, he crossed to the darkened wall where the stones were glowing, and started to pry one loose. As the edge of it came out, he was startled to find that through the opening thus left, he saw below not an empty temple whose shining floor reflected back the glow of torches, but an immense throng of people, half-curious and half-afraid, who crowd-

ed in through every door and pressed toward the Image. Whirling back toward Thora, his words of warning were crushed by the sudden upheaval of a lighted torch thrust through the trap door at the top of the ladder-stairs from the speaking-chamber and followed by the yellow, leering face of Prah. Then, in the split second which followed, a glinting dagger flew toward the girl, and missing her, buried itself in the heavy curtains that draped the opposite wall. But even as she had dodged the dagger, she had drawn a vial of transparent liquid from her robe and had dashed it into his leering smile. As it struck his teeth, it spread over his face, turning his skin purple. For a moment he clawed at his face like a madman, and then, giving a strange gurgling yell, he fell backward down the stairs, the torch bounding after him and lighting the room with receding flares.

"For a moment they faced each other breathlessly in the darkness and then he whispered: 'The temple . . . look . . . they are here.'

"With a bound she had crossed the room, but it was with a bitterly disappointed voice that she answered:

"No, Gnostes, those are earth-men. They are only the

population of De that have been able to get in for the show. A goddess and her earthly lover are not killed every day, you know.'

"I suppose not, though if the fools but knew it, you are not any more of a goddess than I am.'

"They don't, but Prah has his suspicions. He hurled a dagger. But you must be able to recognize the men of Allos in case I . . . in case the next dagger . . .

"I am vulnerable also, Thora.'

"But you must listen. We have so little time now. The men of Allos are not human like us. They travel in machines here on our earth. . . . Listen! They are coming back! Give me the Iris-stone!"

"Is it a weapon?"

"Yes. I had hoped to get back before I had to use it, but that cannot be helped now. I will give them a surprise this time.'

"What about all those people out there? We are two against a thousand.'

"Fear is a wonderful weapon. In a moment they will leave screaming. But the priests may attack from two sides. Get that dagger out of the curtain and guard my back. There is an old forgotten entrance to this room behind those curtains.'

"As he handed Thora the stone, her fingers clasped around his for a moment. And it was with a singing heart that he went

to get the dagger out of the curtains where Prah had hurled it. He groped into the tapestry eagerly but his hands found no dagger. It was gone!

"A wave of horror rushed over him as he realized that someone else was in that darkened room. Turning back to Thora, with the impulse to shield her with his own body until he could at least hear this new intruder, he was startled at the sight of two more faces thrust up the stairs behind another torch. In that same moment, Thora threw up her hands and gave the stone a quick twist. Immediately a green ray of peculiar penetration crackled through the air with a choking, acrid smell. The two priests straightened up, the look of startled surprise quickly becoming agony as their skin turned a ghastly green. Then, as Gnostes rubbed his eyes, they seemed to disappear—to simply fade into nothingness, while the torch flickered a moment uncertainly and then vanished—leaving the room again in total darkness. In the temple, Gnostes heard wails of mortal terror and the stampede of a thousand feet.

HARDLY did he have time to wonder what supernatural power this stone held, when several faces appeared on the stairs, in a desperate attempt to break through the withering wall of

the Green Ray, and at the same moment he caught sight of something glinting out of the corner of his eye. Whirling around, he looked into the leering face of Prah, burned now like a raw steak in the flames, from which the cruel eyes gleamed maliciously. A long, curved knife glittered in his yellow claw. Reaching for the knife with more anger than cunning, Gnostes grasped empty space and winced as the cold blade bit through the flesh of his right arm and laid bare the bone. Hurling his left fist at the head-priest then, he felt the burned flesh of Prah tear beneath his knuckles as other arms gripped him from behind, and pinioned his arms. Wrenching himself loose again, he made another lunge at Prah, striking the startled head-priest full in the stomach and sending him, like a flying bag of grain, straight into Thora, who fell headlong down the steps upon the faces of the advancing priests and followed by Prah. Arms gripped him mercilessly and forced him down the stairs where Prah, cut and bleeding, ordered a lesser priest to hold a torch. Thora's hands were also pinioned now, while several men seemed to be searching the floor for her weapon. Her eyes were still fearless as they looked into his, seeming to signal courage.

"Gnostes was inclined to half-

admire and half-mistrust her optimism. Did she still believe in these fantastic deliverers of hers? Even now that Prah had them both in his power? Even now that he was evidently preparing to torture them on the spot? As for himself, he knew that by the rate he was losing blood, it would be but a matter of time . . . but Thora? He glared at Prah with the snarl of the dying wolf in his throat, and the head-priest smiled back nastily.

"Ordering his men to give him the girl, Prah put a dagger in her hand and advanced toward Gnostes.

"You thought he was handsome, did you? Is that why you liked this slave?"

"She tossed her head contemptuously and stared at him.

"Well, if that was the reason, then take a last look at him, for I am going to spoil his beauty, or rather, I am going to give you the pleasure of spoiling it yourself. First we will carve a line like this . . .' and dragging the struggling, fighting girl toward the young Greek, he plunged the dagger toward Gnostes' face. The blade slashed through his forehead and just missing the eye, laid the cheek back to the bone.

"Through the red tint of the blood that ran into his eye, Gnostes saw Thora glance toward the temple. A mad look of delight swept into her eyes.

"Let him go, Prah. Let him go and you will not be destroyed. It is the men of Allos!"

"No, Goddess Thora, I have no fear of the illusions you bring forth to frighten the timid. Come, another cut. . . ."

"Gnostes saw the knife descending again, as Thora screamed:

"Let him go or I will call for the ray that turns us into nothingness!"

"You no longer have the weapon in your hand, beautiful one."

"The knife came nearer and nearer, reaching, it seemed, toward his one clear eye.

"Let him go, Prah! It is your last chance for life! See . . . they are inside the door!"

"The evil face seemed to blanch for a moment at what was hidden to Gnostes beyond the door. The patches of yellow skin which were not red and bloody grew an ashen grey, and then the eyes spat forth fire.

"Your devils are but illusions! My answer is no!"

"Throwing back her head, she screamed out:

"Bo-Kar! The death-ray! Follow my voice! Turn on the death-ray! And you, Gnostes—now you must carry on!"

"For a second, a blinding flash like a bolt of lightning turned everything to white flame. Thora

and Prah seemed to shrivel up and disappear, while the men who held Gnostes, dropped his arms and fled screaming. Then it seemed to the wounded man, that everything swam crazily around, as the floor came up and hit him a terrific blow upon the head. The white flood of light was turned off at last and the bloody tinge of the wall glimmered out to total blackness. For a while he seemed to hear a buzzing noise at a great distance, but at last this too, dwindled away, leaving him to utter oblivion."

For a moment my friend leaned forward and stared into the coals of the fire, while I, suddenly aware, that I had been tensely listening to the tale of the fight, breathed a sigh that was partly relief and partly amusement over my own concern as I settled back again into the cushions of the divan. Yet, somehow, I could not help staring at his scarred face as he sat there. After all, a scar is not strange, and I have seen men with faces scarred more terribly than his. . . .

Perhaps it was that tense stare of mine that recalled him. He glanced at his pipe, which had long since gone out, and struck a match. I noticed that his fingers were trembling, as he drew in each breath of smoke slowly. Then tossing the match

into the grate, he leaned forward once more—puffing on his pipe quietly and brooding with weary eyes upon the spot where the match flamed for a moment like a tiny torch and then dropped a little blackened cinder, into the violet-red galleries of the coals.

"Thora!" he murmured half to himself. "Somehow she seemed more elfin than human. Thora, with her beauty that was occidental in the color of her hair and skin and oriental in the slight slant of her eyes; Thora, with her viewpoint that was a combination of the ancient sage and the modern scientist; Thora, with her vast knowledge and her timeless perspective—I wonder how many centuries she had probed before she met that heartsick lad who had once been a scholar of Pythagoras!"

I WAS wondering in a puzzled way about this strange malady of the mind which was evidently affecting my friend, for I noticed that he spoke of this creature of his imagination, not as a peg upon which to hang his story illustrating the relativist's doctrines, but as a real woman. Of course, this was an absurd fancy, I assured myself. Yet I realized that their absurd fancies were very real to the insane. Of course, if I allowed myself to actually believe . . . but safely

skeptical once more, I smiled condescendingly and settled back among the pillows.

"The man we have chosen to call Gnostes awoke at last after many tortuous dreams and visions, in a swinging lounge suspended in a room that at first glance looked like a glass cage. Perhaps I had better mention something of these dreams for they were somewhat significant in the light of later events. He thought that he was again pinioned by the stairs and that Prah was dragging Thora toward him with that knife. Then came the blinding flash, and Thora vanished, but the head-priest, smiling that evil smile, slipped away behind the curtains of the speaking chamber. Time and time again the vision came and always Prah managed to evade the force of the death-ray. Therefore, when at last Gnostes found himself awake and sane once more, he did not notice the surroundings of his apartment particularly, but lay quiet, trying to settle in his mind definitely whether or not Prah actually escaped the destruction which Thora brought upon them.

"He was startled by a voice which seemed to whisper:

"'Do not waste your energy, creature-of-earth, upon those things which we are powerless to change.'

"After a moment of paralyz-

ing astonishment, Gnostes realized that he had not heard the words, but that some strange force had apparently impressed them upon his mind.

"Who was that and where are you?" he called.

"Do not be alarmed," came the answer. 'I am a creature of Allos, very different from you in appearance. When you will not be shocked and will regard me as a friend, I will come in. You have been too ill from poisoned wounds to be startled by the unusual, as your kind always are. Let it suffice that we communicate in this manner, and that we are as natural beings as you are or any of your world's animals.'

"Then Thora was not mad! You are from the Blue World?"

"We will discuss that when you awake from a longer sleep, man-of-earth. For the present, this is all.'

"Though Gnostes tried and tried to bring that impression back, he could not, and at last, weary with the sustained effort, he fell asleep.

"When he awoke a second time in the swinging couch after a heavy, dreamless sleep, he remembered that he was in the care of strange creatures, probably far from his own earth. Burning with curiosity, he attempted to rise, only to discover that he was amazingly thin and

weak—a mere shadow of his former self. This surprised him for he thought he had been ill but a few days. Had it been longer? Afterwards he was inclined to think that it had. He moved to his side and called:

"Man of Allos! Come in and talk to me. I have much to ask of you and I want to see you. Please come in now. I have slept a long time—a much longer time, in fact, than I would have cared to remain ignorant, had my will been consulted.'

"Be content, I will come.'

"After what seemed interminable moments of waiting, Gnostes heard a slight rushing sound in what appeared to be the outer chamber of his room. The walls, which apparently were made of glass were a sort of silvery-blue in color, and quite impervious to the eye. Then a portion of the wall opposite to him seemed to part and a peculiar machine about three feet tall approached slowly. Again he heard the unspoken words:

"I live upon a globe of far greater density and therefore heavier air pressure. I must wear this metal suit to protect the delicate organs of my body—especially those of my head, from being exploded in this thin air of yours. In like manner, I warn you that you must wear a metal suit when you decide to go into the rest of the ship where

we live in comfort. Otherwise you will be crushed in the inrush of air. The noise you heard just now was the pumping chamber outside of your door which adjusts the air pressure for those entering and leaving. Do you understand all I am saying?"

"Well, not exactly," Gnostes admitted. "You talk of density and air-pressure for instance. I think I grasp what you mean by the last term and I probably do in a fashion, for the rest of your explanations seem logical."

"What a shame to lose Thora! Ah, well, man-of-earth, I had forgotten that you had so much to learn. I will arrange for you to have a tutor right away. You will start studying as soon as the medical authorities advise. It will be some time before you can carry the heavy metal of your suit, so you must be content to stay in your room somewhat longer. I leave now. Your tutor, Hekanos, will follow me very shortly."

"Though this creature seemed all intellect, the one assigned to Gnostes as his tutor soon showed him that all the men of Allos were not alike, for the first thing the new machine did was to question his charge upon the death of Thora and the fight in the temple. He was very much interested in the story of the Iris-stone as well, and took pains to probe for the minutest details

concerning the manner in which Thora made use of the hidden ray.

THE opportunity of speaking to some sympathetic creature about the death of that brave girl, and especially one who seemed to mourn her loss sincerely, formed a bond which drew a fellow feeling and a devotion from Gnostes as nothing else could have done. And so Gnostes and Hekanos soon became fast friends. It was the man of Allos who described the insane terror of the people that night to take the mind of the boy into brighter channels.

"But think of it, driving the space-ship of Allos right up to the temple. Why that is an incident that the world will never forget—never!"

"No, my friend. Never is a ghost word. The world of earth will forget in a few centuries and if the men of a later age ever succeed in digging up and translating the libraries, such a tale of colored lights around a huge bird that rested in the city grounds and disgorged a swarm of devils, would be passed by as an unintelligent myth or religious legend whose significance has long been lost. You will some day learn that the past is full of such absurd tales—the absurdity of which is very apparent and the significance unapparent."

"And Gnostes, having listened to Pythagoras and then to the far more astounding tales of Thora, was no longer inclined to scoff, but longed to carry his new knowledge back to Greece—the world's one kingdom of the intellect, at all times more friendly to the expanding thought of science than the solidified thought of creed. How little he suspected then that the world can not be told—it must experience for itself in order to believe."

Smead leaned forward and tapped the ashes from his pipe and laid it upon the table beside the empty ale glasses before he continued.

"So Gnostes gained not only a tutor, but also a friend, in this man of Allos. But upon the day that Hekanos presented him with the Iris-stone, the Greek was convinced that his liking for this queer-looking little creature was returned, for his tutor had told him before that one of the stones had already gone to the chemical laboratory in an attempt to make it yield its secret.

"'It is all I could give you that belonged to her,' the man of Allos said simply. 'We found it on the floor of the temple, close beside your unconscious body.'

"'It is the last of the Iris-stones?'"

"Hekanos nodded.

"'The other one will soon yield its secret to the scientists of Al-

los. Then if another raid comes from these unknown creatures, we will be ready.'

"'But the earth, what about mankind?'"

"'When the earth can use such knowledge without abusing it, we will enlighten them.'

"'Tell me, Hekanos, when will I be returned to earth?'"

"'Do you desire to return very soon?'"

"'Yes, there is a man . . .' he whispered, his voice thickening with hate.

"'Revenge is an unworthy object for the expenditure of energy.'

"'Yet I will not be happy until I can be certain that he is dead.'

"'Very well. I will see that you are returned after a short visit to the Blue World.'

"'Thank you, Hekanos.'

"'However, there will be some studies which you will be asked to master first.'

"'Will they take many years?'"

"'If you are apt, they should not take longer than five tiara—as we call our years.'

"So Gnostes began his studies with an ardor that delighted his tutor. Being a natural scholar—one who loves wisdom for its own sake, he drank eagerly of all that was offered, dipping first into the physical sciences. It was natural, perhaps, that rays

should fascinate him, and when he learned that the ship on which he was a passenger was propelled by means of a ray that not only negated gravity but actually harnessed it as a driving force to shoot the ship away from the globe it was leaving, he became very anxious to see the interior of the engine room with its massive controls and its telescopic eye as described by Hekanos.

"When at last the curious suit of armor was brought in, which he was to wear, Gnostes could hardly babble his delight for excitement. He noticed for the first time also, that Hekanos had a long, feeler-like arm that seemed to unroll from under the jaw somewhere, much as a butterfly carries its tongue. With this slender organ almost thread-like at the tip, he adjusted the suit of armor and then led Gnostes into the pumping room.

"'Never come into the pumping room without this armor, or the pressure would crush in your eyes and press through your ears into your brain.'

"Gnostes smiled thoughtfully, for these words evidently meant that soon he would be given the freedom of the ship and allowed to roam about at will. Hekanos caught the inference and nodded.

"As the door closed behind them, leaving them in darkness, Gnostes tried to peer through the heavy glass of his helmet,

which had much resemblance to the modern deep-seat diving suit in its heavy, massive proportions. But the darkness was complete, until, after what seemed an endless period of waiting, a door on the opposite side of the wall opened and he found himself facing a room that reminded him of a vast aquarium. Through air of such murky heaviness that it looked more like water, he moved slowly, gazing from the luminescent plants that glowed softly like languorous silver decorations along the walls, to the living color of the creatures which seemed to swim toward him. Though he could now feel their vibrations of excitement and curiosity, yet they seemed to move with exaggerated ease and grace. Indeed he began to have the strange feeling that he was looking into a magic mirror, which slowed up all movements and made of each hurried action a poem of slow rhythm. He had ample time to observe and admire these delicate creatures before the nearest reached him.

FORMED not unlike the fly, yet they had a beauty far beyond anything that despicable little insect could boast. Their bodies were covered with a down of turquoise blue dusted over with a frost of silver as if a bit of diamond dust clung to each individual hair. Their heads were

covered with a plume-like mane of silver that shimmered with a pearly iridescence and changed subtly with every change in their thoughts. But perhaps loveliest of all, was their gossamer wings which were rainbow-like in their delicacy, even when folded upon their backs. In fancy, Gnostes imagined one of them spreading those fragile wings in a nocturnal, fairy world and drifting through the heavy air like a pearly fleck from some giant moon.

"It was Hekanos that recalled his thoughts by the contortions with which he divested himself of his heavy armor and smoothed down his plume with that thread-like tongue. Suddenly a golden light played lightly over the edges of that magnificent mane and Gnostes felt the thought-impression:

"Yet more surprises await you in the control-room of the ship. Are you willing to see even stranger sights than we present by our appearance?"

"Gnostes nodded eagerly, but the movement under his cumbersome armor became one of stately gravity. Turning slowly, he followed Hekanos with ponderous steps, feeling that now indeed, he had entered that land of the magic mirror and must walk with languorous deliberation through this medium, which seemed unreal somehow—more

like a world whose values had been warped by an unknown lens.

"As they followed winding tubular passageways of polished metal, reflecting in a thousand curves the luminous colors of Hekanos' body, Gnostes reflected that Thora had appeared to move with a sort of languorous grace even about the temple floor on earth. But these thoughts were brought to a close by entering another great chamber. Here, however, no phosphorescent plants draped themselves in the heavy air. Instead, tremendous motors throbbed, and shining pistons beat out a rhythm of motion. As Hekanos led him from one engine to another, explaining their functions, Gnostes caught sight of a great luminous disc in the center of the room, that kept turning slowly, and pressed a question about it.

"That is the eye of the ship. I told you about it when we were in your room. It shows the space all around us. It is connected with various instruments of vision in the prow, around the sides and on the stern. If you stay here for many days, you may see some of the systems which we pass and globes in all stages of their life. Some will be molten, some gaseous, some green and some cloudy. We are nearing one that is dead. We call it Namoor. It is airless, like your moon. In the sunshine you would

burn up and in the shade you would freeze. Behold it!"

"Gnostes watched the screen with fascinated interest as a great silver globe swung into sight. Endless plains, worn down by rivers that had long since dried up, glittered in the sunlight and led into a dry sea. As Gnostes followed the old coast line, he thought he made out the ruins of a towering city. Hekanos, sensitive to the new impression, verified his suspicions.

"'Yes it is a city—or the ruins of one. The race died off or left the globe long before we attempted spacetravel and we found it just as you see it now . . . a dead planet rolling through space with the ruins of its dead past—a perpetual tomb.'

"Gnostes frowned as a turn of the ship showed them the skeleton fingers of the building pointed against the dead plain. He could not have told why, but he shuddered and turned away from the screen, seeking out the instrument board instead.

"There Hekanos followed him and explained the speed-indicator, the meteor-finder and space-recorder.

"'Space records are made by every space ship. Then, if something unforeseen happens, the rescuing party can tell the exact story of the accident to the master of records and the mistake will not be repeated. All records

are kept of each and every trip and can be referred to at any time.'

"'Your kind is very methodical,' he thought by way of comment, but he was becoming conscious of the fact that the armor seemed to be getting heavier and heavier.

"Hekanos seemed to sense his discomfort immediately.

"'You are still a little weaker than I thought you were. Sit on the floor and I will have you carried to your room.'

"'But why can I sit down instead of floating off? Why should the armor be heavy here in space? There is no gravity here,' he persisted as he sank to the floor.

"'That is true, but we make use of some artificial gravity for our own comfort. We are used to even more than you are and we would be doubly uncomfortable without any.'

"But Gnostes, more weary than he suspected, had already drifted off to sleep. So ended his first tour of the space-ship from Allos."

Smead leaned over to stir the fire and I could not help thinking as I watched him, the glow suddenly lighting up the crevice of his scarred cheek, that there was something cat-like in his movements comparable to these luminous beings from the Blue World.

"But, Dr. Smead," I objected as he picked up the tongs and threw a couple of fresh coals on the fire, "would this man whom we have chosen to call Gnostes, not notice a warping of the time value by noting the slow movements?"

He looked up with that strange twisted smile.

"Why, certainly he would not notice a warping of the time value. He did notice the slow movements, but that was natural."

"How so?"

"Because you see," tossing on the black coals and shoving them over the red ones, "Gnostes was suddenly thrust into a heavier medium. If you think you can move quickly in a heavier medium, try running when you are above your waist in water."

"I stand corrected," I laughed. "Though if I wanted to press the argument, I would say that there are animals which can."

"And I would answer that the men of Allos were not of that type."

"All right, I raise the white flag of truce. What becomes of Gnostes?"

He laid down the tongs and came back to the divan. Seating himself among the pillows, he began with that reminiscent tone:

"Time is a dimension which seems to become rather elastic

as soon as you get away from familiar landmarks. I dare say you have had the experience of being unable to judge the hour, even though you have had that familiar hour-glass, the sun, to go by. Imagine then, what a difficulty—in fact, I should say how impossible it would have been for Gnostes, who had no hour-glass at all—not even the day and night.

"After what might have been weeks or months of study and growing familiarity with the interior of the ship, during which time he had become increasingly sensitive to thought-impressions, he began to sense at last a subtle but constantly increasing excitement. Finally seeking out Hekanos, he asked the reason.

"I did not tell you because I wanted to see if you could feel it for yourself. We are nearing the Blue World."

"Gnostes could hardly conceal the thrill that shot through him at this announcement. Seeking out the control-room again with Hekanos, he found a large group of the gleaming turquoise creatures gathered around the screen.

"Won't the size of the crowd interfere with the guiding of the ship when we start to land?"

"Certainly it would. But that is easily remedied in a manner that will keep everyone happy. A huge screen will be constructed in the center of the main hall.

After this Ur (waking time), no one will be allowed in the control-room.'

HEKANOS was right, for the next time Gnostes entered the heavier atmosphere of the hall from his own glass cage, he found innumerable creatures at work on the giant screen. With languorous movements, only a little less slow than usual, they handed the parts from one to the other and passed them in a living line to the crew on top of the huge platform. Gnostes sat down and watched them as they put the monster machine together, not even stirring for his broth and capsules of nourishment, when he was informed that they were ready.

"When at last they were on the point of adjusting the great glass screen in place, Gnostes offered his services, but Hekanos would not allow him to move. The boy was annoyed.

"I am no longer sick. I can help. In fact I am quite a bit larger than you are and therefore I should be much stronger.'

"You would be if you lived on Allos, but as an earth-man, you are not.'

"I do not understand. What has that to do with it?"

"Everything. You are built to withstand only a certain amount of gravity, therefore you have but a certain amount of strength

according to your size. We are built to withstand a far greater amount of gravity. Therefore we have been given more strength for our size than you have, because you see, it takes a great deal to even move our weight on our planet.'

"Gnostes nodded.

"And the inference is that I would be quite helpless on your globe?"

"Exactly.'

"Gnostes did not relish this thought, but his interest in the machine which was being put together before him, gradually banished it from his mind. As the great screens were adjusted and bolted into place, and minor parts checked over, the crowd gathered about the instrument was asked to step back and the one in charge of the task gave the signal to turn on the current. In another moment the screens began to glow softly and soon a huge globe swung into sight. Gnostes forgot that he had learned thought-reading and asked out loud:

"Is that the Blue World?"

"Hekanos nodded slowly.

"Are we approaching its dark side?"

"No. It is situated farther from its sun than your world. At one time it had a bright companion that was self-luminous and which gave it both light and heat, but the companion has

cooled off and is now in the state of a mere molten body. Therefore, for countless generations, the men of Allos have manufactured their own light and heat. The companion looks like a great orange moon from Ultair, on the Blue World—the city to which we are going.’

“If it had not been that its twin planet was hot, life probably would not have evolved on the Blue World?”

“Probably not. It was too far from the sun to have the necessary amount of heat. Life needs two things in order to thrive at all—heat and moisture. Neptune, that planet of your own sun, which is so far out in space, for instance, has enough size to at-

tract an atmosphere and therefore moisture, but it has too little heat for the support of life.’

“Gnostes, needless to say, had never heard of Neptune, which, by the way, Hekanos called by another name, but his ignorance was not allowed to continue for long. When they had concluded their study of this planet, and had turned back to the screen, the Blue World was very much closer.

“Gnostes could make out vast mountain-chains now that cast needle-pointed shadows across the perpetual blue, semi-twilight of the plains. Despite these evidences of fairly recent volcanic action, Hekanos assured him that Allos was older than the



earth by countless millenniums.

"'And since we have learned the secrets of interstellar travel, we have increased our knowledge by as many more,' he added.

"But Gnostes scarcely paid any attention.

"Look, Hekanos, what is that spot that looks like a great jewel glittering with sudden flashes of hidden fire?"

"It is the city of Oupoteh which we pass on the way to Ultair.'

"But how can it be a city? It looks like one solid gigantic blue-green emerald or jewel of strange beauty. It shines all over as if it had a surface and it is through this that those flashes are seen.'

"Your eyes do not deceive you. It is a city under glass. All of our cities have that heavy glass dome and viewed from an interstellar space ship, they are surely a strange sight.'

"But I do not understand. Why do the men of Allos live under glass?"

"Don't you remember that I told you the planet had become too cold for comfort since its twin or companion about which it revolves, much as your moon swings about your earth, has cooled down? The men of Allos have manufactured their own heat and light for generations.'

"Gnostes was about to apologize for his stupidity, when he noticed that the city which Heka-

nos had called Oupoteh was swinging rapidly past. The ship was evidently coming down at a slant. More mountain chains were passed, and then vast fields which were also under glass, and lighted by what at their distance seemed to be more of these glowing plants.

"As they climbed over the sharp tips of the mountain chain, Gnostes saw a large lake-like dark blue volcanic glass, spreading into another glass-covered city with its internal flashes of colored fire.

"Ultair?"

"Hekanos nodded.

SLOWLY the ship circled toward the ground and curved its way gracefully along the plain toward the glass wall. Gnostes noticed from this new angle that a portion of the mountains, as well as a bit of the lake, were included under this glass dome, and concluded therefore that it was probably not only more important but also more picturesque than its sister city. Suddenly a portion of the heavy glass opened inward, and the ship nosed her way through the gate and into a series of giant glass locks, which like huge traps, opened one into the other.

"Temperature traps.' Hekanos informed Gnostes and then, 'This one will open up into the city proper.'

"The temperature trap referred to was something larger than the rest, its curving sides glistening with the lights of the ship that it sheltered for a moment. Then again a great gate swung open before them and Gnostes saw the city of Ultair.

"Accustomed as he was now to the unusual, yet he was inclined to think later that his first glimpse of Ultair gave the thrill of a long and varied life to his soul. In consternation he stared from the twisted cane effect of some of these tremendous towers, to the gleaming crystal-like formation of others, made seemingly of a slightly luminous metal, so that they appeared to shine in the dark blue semi-twilight. Over their projected pavements and intersecting bridges swarmed a turquoise throng of living creatures whose glowing plumes gave a sprinkling of frosted silver light to their stream of motion.

"All this Gnostes seemed to see through a heavy blue haze, as if he had suddenly found himself in some unaccountable fashion upon the ocean floor, looking through the water at a weird, luminous illusion. The space above their ship had become but a deep-blue darkness, pierced only by hundreds of criss-crossing rays of various colors, probably guiding unseen air craft along their lanes of travel. From

this darkness, throngs of winged turquoise creatures were continually coming and alighting upon the bridges, while other throngs were rising from the avenues of traffic and fading into the shadows above the towers.

"The air must be dirty,' Gnostes thought, unconscious for the moment that his thoughts would be immediately read by Hekanos. He was not allowed to entertain that erroneous belief for long, however.

"Not at all. On the contrary, the air is being continually washed chemically so that it will not be disease-laden. The bacterial life in the air of your cities make them particularly poisonous to us.'

"Bacterial life?" Gnostes asked in puzzled surprise.

"Oh, I had forgotten that we have not studied the biological sciences as yet, together.'

"It was characteristic of Hekanos to take the attitude that he, too, was but a scholar.

"As the ship swooped gracefully over the city, Gnostes could not shake off the sensation that he was on the ocean floor, looking through the soundless depths of the sea at a fairy-like ghost city, which might fade at any moment, leaving only cool, blue water waving through the twisted formations of a cavernous grotto which he could never explore.

"Winding its way through the towers with their ant-like lanes of traffic, which now flashed by in such bewildering closeness and succession that Gnostes first would see the corner of a suspended bridge flashed on the screen, followed by a swiftly expanding platform, the ship finally headed definitely toward the volcanic glass lake that spread to one side of the city. Gnostes noticed that this lake was of deepest midnight blue, upon which appeared to toss a sheen of changing peacock, tipped with a phosphorescent foam. This, too, expanded as the ship turned to land, and then suddenly the screen went blank. Gnostes realized it had been turned off, and as his companions moved away with that lazy grace which was characteristic of them, he also tried to rise. But he could not move. It was as if he had been paralyzed while watching the screen. His consternation was quickly noticed by Hekanos, who had not left his side.

"You are feeling the effects of the increased gravitation."

"In other words, I must be moved about here and fed like a helpless lump of flesh, just as certain species of earth insects move and feed their large but helpless young?"

"Yes, but in your own glass cage we have taken pains to reduce the gravity in order that you

can always have relief. You will also be given a small machine which will propel you anywhere. The mechanism of control is all under your hands. In the meantime we will carry you over the city. Are you ready to leave the ship?"

"As soon as Hekanos felt the impression of assent, he ordered two of the creatures standing near to lift Gnostes, which they did by swinging that slender feeler or tongue-like organ around the metal that encased his body and carrying him between them to a sort of open carriage that was standing in one corner. Gnostes had not noticed this contrivance before, but he had no time to examine it, as he was placed easily on the seat where he was made as comfortable as possible. Then as the two helpers moved lazily away, Hekanos climbed in beside him and touched a button. Gnostes felt a wave of terror within him when the thing began to move. Of all the strange things he had seen, this indeed seemed the most supernatural, perhaps because the thing was not alive, but made of metal, and unlike the space ship, he could see no engine or reason that it should move. It was Hekanos who composed him.

"Do not worry—you are not crazy. The machine, which is a very common one, does move un-

der its own power. I had simply forgotten to explain its engine or method of operation to you. But that is one of the things which we will discuss at another time. Behold! We are leaving the ship!"

GNOSTES saw two great glass doors swing back in the curving glass wall opposite them. Almost instinctively he drew in a deep breath only to realize that he was encased behind metal, through which air was passed to him by means of a tiny machine that checked the pressure.

"I did not realize that we had landed yet, Hekanos. But since we have, I am most anxious to move about on solid ground again. The knowledge that I cannot is really a terrible thing."

"Thora felt the same way when we first brought her here. Finally she persuaded some of our engineers to construct her a private landscape in the mountains near a little lake. When you are tired of Ultair then, you only need to ask for this place and the pressure will be adjusted for you. In Thora's absence it has been used as a park, because the young greatly enjoyed the lesser gravity, and their subsequent increase in strength."

"You say that the gravity has been partly counteracted there?"

"Yes, you will need neither armor suits nor runabout machines."

"To know that there is such a spot, Hekanos, takes the despair out of my mind and lets me look upon this visit to Ultair in the light of a wonderful adventure." . . .

"Good. That is the spirit of youth, Gnostes, the spirit we should never lose."

"The vehicle was moving forward very slowly now, waiting its turn as throngs of shimmering turquoise bodies and rainbow wings pressed through the great opening. As the car crept nearer to the door, Gnostes caught sight of the twisted candy-cane city glowing in the background and then at last as they reached the blue haze of the outer air, he could look down the long suspended bridge to the lake below. But now that he could see it nearer, he realized that it was no lake upon which he had looked, when it was flashed upon the screen. The lake was in reality not a liquid but a great solidified plain of some dark-blue composition or volcanic glass, upon which the waves of peacock which he had seen tipped with phosphorescent froth, were untold multitudes of these creatures of Allos with their tossing, luminescent plumes forming an ever-changing, living sea of color.

"It is easy, I believe, even for those unused to thought-reading, to catch the temper of a vast crowd gathered for some occa-

sion, though no words are heard. It was therefore doubly easy for Gnostes to grasp the impressions of not only curiosity but also of grief. And by this he knew that they had learned about the death of Thora.

"As he reached the foot of the bridge and the car moved up to a brilliant platform constructed of the softly glowing metal, Gnostes had the feeling that the individuals waiting there were going to question him. He was right. As the car moved slowly up the platform, the throngs that had come out ahead of them parted majestically, and he was ushered into the circle of light, as it were. As the machine came to a halt, he felt a very compelling voice say:

"We greet you, creature-of-earth. We welcome you to the Land of Allos and the City of Ultair."

"Gnostes returned the greetings from his heart for, perhaps particularly through Hekanos, he had become very fond of the graceful beings of living color.

"We have learned of the tragic death of our child Thora, who passed away with the wish that we take you back in her place. Because of that last message, winged on the very death-ray that she called for, we have followed out her wishes, and you are here."

"In a momentary flash of bitter memory, the boy recalled her words—'And you, Gnostes—now you must carry on.' That memory brought back a face that he had almost forgotten—that of Prah—with his smiling devil-smile.

"What is it that you wish me to do?"

"Go back to earth at stated intervals and keep up with their increase of knowledge. We do not pledge you to silence about your trip here, because you will never be believed, even if you do tell. Until the earth reaches a more peaceful stage, however, we ask that you keep the landing places of our ship a secret. Are you willing to do this?"

"Yes. But I have one request. There is a man of whose death I must be certain."

"We have been informed of this desire . . . unworthy though we feel it to be. However, we also know that in this matter you will some day share our opinion. We can return you to earth at once or keep you here and teach you for a while. Would you be willing to stay and partake of some more of our knowledge before returning?"

"A vision of the great Pythagoras seemed to rise before him.

"Revenge can wait, creatures-of-Allos, if you will grant me permission to visit my native

land again upon my next trip. But whether you grant that request or not, I am bound to add that revenge must wait.'

"A light of approbation rippled over the sea of iridescent plumes.

"Well spoken, man-of-earth. So shall it be.'

"As if this had been the password, the sea of luminous creatures began to break up into what seemed to be giant waves of dazzling spray, but which was vast swarms winging their way into the blue haze that hung above. So surprised was Gnostes at this sudden departure of the waiting throngs, that he had not noticed that wings had unrolled from the sides of their little car as well. Therefore he was again startled as these thin, pearly appendages suddenly tilted up, blocking out his view for the moment, and the carriage rose easily into the air.

"Gracefully they flew to the city, where they alighted upon the curve of a wide bridge, and proceeded to a vast glowing door-way in one of the wider buildings. Passing through the lazily moving masses, along curving glass tunnels that reflected every movement of the gleaming traffic, they found themselves entering a hall of polished jet, along whose walls curled tall phosphorescent, silver plants like giant, fantastic fres-

coes. These plants seemed to be of the same type that he saw on the ship, except that they were far more massive, and could probably boast of more age.

"From this hall, he was taken to a room where his voice and portrait were recorded. Then after being asked to talk aloud into a small disc so that his voice might be heard through the entire land, he obeyed without a murmur. He had seen so many wonders by this time, that he would not have denied the supernatural powers of any disc, no matter what absurd thing they might tell him it would do.

"At the end of his speech, however, he began to droop somewhat, and Hekanos, watchfully observant of any signs of fatigue, waived all the other functions that had evidently been arranged, and hurried his charge off to a vast, luxurious glass cage, where he helped Gnostes climb out of his armor.

AFTER his friend had gone, Gnostes wandered about for a few moments, looking over the hundreds of books and old scrolls that filled untold shelves, until finding himself at last nodding over one, he put it aside and stretched upon his swinging divan without bothering about the meal that was waiting for him on a marble table beyond. Thinking to rest himself for just a mo-

ment, he sank into a heavy, dreamless slumber that lasted who knows how long.

"So began the new life of Gnostes upon the Blue World, and it was not long before he was handling his run-about like a veteran of Allos, and easily discussing the mechanism of instruments which at first had seemed so incomprehensible.

"But though he accustomed himself readily to his new environment, yet there was one thing which he could not forget in spite of his interest in his studies, and that was Prah, the head-priest. He planned the details of his revenge with minute exactness during his hours of recreation, putting aside as quite unlikely the possibility of the man with that yellow parchment skin and devil-smile having been killed by the ray that struck Thora. Perhaps, because he wanted to wring the rascal's neck so badly, the probability of finding him alive and happy seemed more certain every time he contemplated the thought. Therefore he began to live for revenge and was as a result intoxicated with delight when Hekanos announced that the day of his return had at last been decided upon. Gnostes had tied his life upon revenge—revenge on Prah first and then upon his old masters of the slave-ship. But he had built his life upon an illusion. He had yet

to learn that time is a dimension, which may be warped as other dimensions may be warped. This he learned, when he stood at last upon the ruins of De—a city that had been destroyed in the day of some past generation, and gathered the tales from some mumbling old inhabitants. Yet he stood there upon the crumbling mound of what had been the temple and looked out across that deserted harbor, a man still in the physical prime of his manhood. When he realized this, he shrank from going back to his native land—he who was but the ghost of a former generation.

"But he did go back, nevertheless, only to find his family long extinct and forgotten and new creeds flourishing in the old places of learning. Barbarians had not taken the country as yet but rumbles of distant thunder were heard, while in the west a new empire was rising whose armies were destined to trample over most of the civilized nations of that day—Rome. Heart-sick at the fanaticism of supposedly learned peoples, and the war-drums of barbaric ones, he turned back again to the lazy grace and scientific mind of the Blue World. Gnostes too, had suddenly gained perspective."

* * *

"Very interesting but entirely

impossible," I commented. "You will remember that I said my credulity had a vanishing point. You have passed it."

Smead looked up at me with that twisted smile.

"And may I ask when that happened?"

"Certainly. It happened when Gnostes found himself in another century."

"You mean to say that you do not believe that such a thing is possible?"

"Of course not. I still maintain that time is absolute, or practically so."

"Yet you agreed that if a day should be slowed up a thousand times, we would not notice the difference, that is, if everything should be slowed up in proportion."

"True."

"And in taking a star of lower density, where gravity is very much less, you must admit that the pendulum would swing much slower. In other words, the clock would be actually retarded."

"Suppose I grant that the pendulum would swing more slowly. What of it? The clock simply would not be functioning correctly."

"There you are with your viewpoint that still clings to the mud of this earth. For a globe of this size and this density, it would not. For a globe of the size where it is ticking off the sec-

onds, it certainly would. For the larger globe the atom is vibrating more slowly. Vital processes of all kinds would be retarded. In other words, we would actually grow old more slowly."

"Einstein has certainly made a convert out of you," I laughed.

"But man, that is common sense. You know that recent experiments all seem to bear out the theory that time is retarded in the presence of a gravitational field. The atom on the sun actually appears to vibrate more slowly."

"I admit that the lines do seem to shade toward the red, but there may be other reasons. And besides, even though I should grant the possibility that Gnostes would age at a slower rate in Allos, than he would—say in London, yet what about the interstellar journey? Even at the speed of a rifle bullet, a spaceship would take over a million years to go to the nearest star."

"But let us once more refer to Einstein. You admit that recent experiments have proved that apparently velocity increases mass?"

"If you are referring to the beta particles which shoot off in B rays at velocities nearly that of light, I admit that the mass does seem to increase according to their velocity."

"Yet an observer stationed on a beta particle would not notice

this warping of space because of the fact that all his measuring apparatus would also be warped in proportion."

"But what has that to do with time?"

"Time is also warped by velocity."

"How so?"

"A clock that is moved at a great velocity actually shows a shorter time of endurance than the stationary clock."*

"I have heard about these experiments. But if I argue that the instrument has been disturbed by the movement and therefore has not recorded properly, you will reply that it has recorded properly, for its velocity but not for ours, or in other words, that the moving clock has recorded properly for itself, while the stationary clock has recorded properly for itself only?"

"Exactly."

"And time, therefore, is slowed up according to speed?"

"Certainly. Or let us say that anything moving at the speed of light, which is the fastest of all possible† speeds, cannot age at all while it is traveling through space. In other words, when we see the light of Mizar, we see light that has traveled through space for about seventy-five years but it has not aged while

it is going through that space. It is the same as when it left Mizar seventy-five years ago."

YOU are not trying to tell me now that this spaceship had the speed of light, are you? You know that if mass keeps on increasing with velocity, the inference is that it would be infinite at the speed of light. Therefore a metal could hardly travel at such a speed."

"No, I did not say that it had the speed of light, though I must say that it had considerably more velocity than that of a rifle bullet. According to earth time, Gnostes took very long indeed to make the journey. According to Gnostes himself, who measured his time by that of the ship in which he found himself, the time was reasonably short."

"Well I must say that you make out a good case, Dr. Smead."

"The fantastic quality of Einstein's theory is a thing that disappears before the reason. That is why. And reason is what I always try to follow. It is reason that leads science: it is emotion that leads creed, and yet for all our boasted reason, man is still an emotional animal."

"But suppose you tell me what happened to Gnostes—that is, after he returned to the Blue World."

Smead leaned over and raked

* Borel—Space and Time.

† Rirkhoff—Origin, Nature and Influence of R. Also E. Cunningham—Prin. of R. Also Carmichael—Theory of R.

the coals slowly, thoughtfully.

"He retired to Thora's villa where a giant moon was wont to peer with a distorted face through the thick glass and splash its orange light along a dark blue lake. There he studied with Hekanos and later with other teachers. Finally he gave himself into the keeping of the hall of suspended animation from whence after awakening he was sent back to an earth stagnated in the dark ages. Disgusted enough to swear, he would never return; he spent much time in interstellar travel. On his next visit to Allos, he was informed that the earth showed signs of waking and it seemed that a visit in about a thousand years might be worth while. Accordingly, he again entered the hall of suspended animation and timed his awakening for some time in the earth's twentieth century."

"And do you think that this time he will find it interesting enough to remain?"

"No. There is too much information to be carried back to the Blue World. But he will come again soon—say in about two hundred years."

I was watching him thoughtfully as the flame-light danced about that scarred face.

"In the meantime, let us forget Gnostes. I asked you here tonight, not to narrate such a tale, but to ask a favor."

"And what may that be?"

"I have received word that I must leave rather unexpectedly tomorrow for the desert of Chili. It is a secret expedition and very dangerous. I may never come back. Now I don't know why I should have taken a fancy to you the other evening at the reception, but you impressed me as a man of your word. I could have made other arrangements, but since you seem to like my attempts with the paint brush, I am going to ask you if you would like to keep them for me indefinitely—with certain stipulations concerning their disposal at your death, that is, in case I never return to London?"

"Did you say that you were asking a favor? I think that you meant to say you were bestowing one."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"My works are still very crude. I only wish to keep them, because, even though I try to follow reason, I still remain an emotional animal."

"But why the plural? Is there another?" I asked, glancing at the slave in the picture, who seemed to fairly move in the semi-darkness.

"Yes, there is another. It is the portrait of a woman—the woman I loved. Though I have tried to cover her memory and crowd it out by travel and study, yet the pain of it haunts me always."

Once more he sat there staring at those violet-red galleries of the fire.

"But the provisions I am to make about them in my will—you have not. . . ."

He aroused himself slowly.

"Ah, yes. Of course—the provisions. You may consider them the fancies of a diseased mind. Consider them so if you wish, but carry them out. Do you promise to do this?"

"I would be liable to do anything to possess that painting. It is uncanny. Really, it almost seems alive."

"Do you promise?" he persisted.

"Yes."

"Very well. You will have them placed in the vault of a safe bank and instruct the institution to guard them well for the space of two hundred years."

"Two hundred years."

"Relinquishing them at the end of that time to no one but a man of the following description. He will wear dark glasses over his eyes, and he will disclose a deep dagger scar in his right arm similar to this one." Rolling up his right sleeve, my friend bared a muscular arm that showed the deep imprint of a knife. "He will resemble me in features and in this slashing cut across my face, but he will be somewhat older than I am. Last of all, he will show the authorities a left ankle

that bears the undeniable marks of a heavy shackle."

I tried to conceal any thoughts that might express themselves on my face as I rose.

"Then I may never see you again?"

"Probably not, Mr. Newtonian."

"I am afraid you have changed that name," and then with sudden earnestness: "You will not allow me to attempt any protection from the . . . danger?"

"No."

"Nor would you consider having me along for . . . company?"

He looked up with that twisted smile and rose lazily.

"Not this time."

"And if you do not come back, may I organize a searching expedition?"

"It would be useless."

"Why?"

"You would find no trace of me."

"That would be very strange."

"But true, nevertheless."

I had started toward the door, but I hung back and turned around again.

"Would you answer a very childish question, Mr.—Relativist?"

"Certainly."

"What sun is circled by the Blue World?"

He smiled a slow, enigmatic smile.

"What does it matter? Perhaps we will say it swings like a dark cinder around the giant Sirius. Was it not recently that astro-physicists discovered an unknown metal of enormous density there—so heavy, indeed, that less than a teaspoonful would weigh a ton?"

* * *

HE has been gone for two years now—that strange character my friend at the reception described as an "interesting mystery." He never came back from the desert of Chili.

Yet when the firelight in my library flickers on cold evenings upon the agonized face of a young galley slave, my eye inevitably drops to the heavy shackle around his left leg, and then wanders to the companion painting on the opposite wall. There in the torchlight of an ancient marble temple, a girl of pale beauty stands with arms outspread, her auburn hair gleaming in the glow of the light behind her, and her slightly

tilted Oriental eyes filled with love. And yet it is not the girl who inevitably holds my attention, for it always wanders finally to the huge image of a woman's face resting on the silken paws of a tiger. It rests upon her because in the semi-darkness of the temple those unwinking eyes stare out as if glowing with hidden fire. . . .

Then as I turn back to the coals, I find myself wondering, always wondering—if in the silence of that bleak and almost unknown land, a monster spaceship came down upon the desert and carried him away. . . . Or if he is merrily adventuring fancy-free in some far corner of the earth and laughing over the memory of a gullible fool who actually believed the wildest tale he had ever yet tried to tell—even though he had warned the poor chap ahead of time that he had sometimes been called—The Prince of Liars.

THE END

The Philadelphia Science Fiction Conference, one of the oldest SF conferences in the United States, will be held this year on Saturday, November 9, at one p.m. in the Constitution Room of the Sheraton Hotel in Philadelphia. The principal speaker will be Frederik Pohl. For additional information contact Tom Purdom, 1213 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, Pa. All are welcome.

SF Profile

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

FEW science-fiction writers have been able to span nearly three decades—almost the entire lifetime of sf—and retain throughout a fresh imagination, a vivid style, and the ability to change ideas to keep abreast of new trends and new readers. One of the best of these few is Edmond Hamilton.

Hamilton made his first appearance as a writer with *The Monster-God of Mamurth* in the



EDMOND HAMILTON

August, 1962, issue of WEIRD TALES. But as late as 1959-60-61, three novels of his were consecutive choices of the Doubleday Science Fiction Book Club: *The Star of Life*, *The Haunted Stars*, *Battle for the Stars*. In short fiction, too, he continues to excel. His *Requiem* (AMAZING, April, 1962) was the most acclaimed story of the year in that magazine. Only slightly less popular was *The Stars, My Brothers* (AMAZING, May, 1962).

Both stories displayed the refinement of technical skills and the maturity of outlook that have added new dimensions to

Hamilton's long-acknowledged mastery of action-adventure and galactic sweep.

When Hamilton's first story appeared, science fiction magazines as a specialized group were only six months old (AMAZING STORIES, April, 1926, was the first.) The hotbeds of good science fiction previously were Munsey's ARGOSY and WEIRD TALES. One of the "greats" among ARGOSY's fantasy writers was A. Merritt. Using Merritt's classic *The People of the Pit* (ALL-STORY MAGAZINE, Jan. 5, 1918), a masterpiece about a lost city in an Alaskan cave, as his inspiration,

Hamilton made his début with a story on a similar theme. It was titled, *Beyond the Unseen Wall*. WEIRD TALES' editor Farnsworth Wright rejected it because of an unclear ending. Almost a year later, it was rewritten and appeared as *The Monster-God of Mamurth*.

By a remarkable coincidence WEIRD TALES featured in the same issue the only story Merritt had ever submitted to that magazine, *The Woman of the Wood*. WEIRD TALES used to rate its stories according to reader preferences and print a monthly report of the front runners. As a headswelling beginner's achievement, Hamilton's yarn scored second only to Merritt, beating out such old favorites as Lovecraft and August W. Derleth.

Even before *The Monster-God of Mamurth* was published, Hamilton had sold Wright *Across Space*, a three-part novel serialized in the immediate following Sept., 1926 WEIRD TALES.

The Metal Giants was given the cover of the Dec., 1926, WEIRD TALES. Despite the fact that it used the old Frankenstein theme of an artificial brain turning on its creator and building atom-powered robots which devastate cities, it received *three* times as many votes as its nearest runner-up, winning a thunderous first place in the issue.

The Atomic Conquerors (WEIRD TALES, Feb., 1927) again rated the banner spot with readers. It told of a war between creatures of the micro-universe and the macro-universe with the earth as a battleground. The following issue (March, 1927) *Evolution Island*, an imaginative *tour de force* concerning a ray that speeds up evolution, missed first place by only a few votes. At the age of 23 Hamilton had gotten off to an auspicious start.

EDMOND HAMILTON was born in Youngstown, Ohio, on Oct. 21, 1904, when that part of the country still possessed a New England village air. His father's side of the family was Scotch-Irish and had moved into Ohio from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in 1820. There was also some Welsh ancestry and a strong strain of Indian blood, which is reflected in Hamilton's features. His father, Scott B. Hamilton, was a newspaper cartoonist. The family was Presbyterian. Maude Whinery, his mother, was a Quaker from New Castle, Pa. She was a school teacher prior to her marriage.

The family fell upon difficult days shortly after Edmond was born. His father tried running a farm outside of Poland, Ohio. The boy's earliest memories were of a home with no electricity, water, nor gas. Automobiles

were a rarity. "The cows, the chickens, the sugar camps in the snowy woods which we children hung around, gave the whole feel of an old, tranquil, unchanging, rural America," Hamilton recalls. But farm life was left behind when the family moved to New Castle, Pa. in 1911 and his father landed a job on a local newspaper. Young Hamilton was far from a recluse, enjoying a fishing, fighting, fun-raising childhood. As a student he was exceptional, entering high school when he was only 10 years old and graduating at 14!

At Westminster College, "I started out my sophomore years as an intellectual of 15," remembers Hamilton. "I smoked a briar pipe and read Shaw, O'Neill and Ibsen. I majored in physics, but after my first year I got bored with classes." The difference in age between him and other students took its toll. He became increasingly introverted and took to collecting old books (which was to become a life-long passion). There had been only a minor interest in fantasy heretofore, but now ALL-STORY MAGAZINE and ARGOSY began to take on a new sheen. The marvelous fancies of Merritt, Burroughs and others supplanted O'Neill and Ibsen. They ushered him into a world of escape from the routine of academic life. When he consistently began cutting chapel,

Westminster, a Presbyterian school, expelled him during his third year.

Though bitterly disappointed, Hamilton's family stood by him. He went to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad as yard clerk. When the job was eliminated in 1924, he sat down to write his first story.

WEIRD TALES never rejected an Edmond Hamilton story for any reason. Particularly influential was Hamilton's story *The Moon Menace* (WEIRD TALES, Sept., 1927). It was here that Murray Leinster obtained the idea of using impenetrable darkness as a weapon in *The Darkness on Fifth Avenue*. The same story makes early use of matter transmitters as a method of interplanetary transport. Equally as remarkable was *The Time Raider*, a four-part novel beginning in the October, 1927, WEIRD TALES. The intriguing notion of bringing together in one age a number of warriors from different eras in history had been used previously by J. L. Anton in *Creatures of the Ray* (ARGOSY, Oct. 10, 1925) but never in a full-length novel. A few years after the appearance of *The Time Raider* John W. Campbell, Jr. would pick up the problem of fighting an invisible airship (*Solarite*, AMAZING STORIES, Nov., 1930) which Hamilton used so

dramatically, and solve it in his own manner.

At this time Hamilton had launched into the super-science phase of his writing—a period when he began tossing worlds and suns around like billiard balls. But even more significant was *Within The Nebula* (WEIRD TALES, May, 1929) which projected the reader into a far distant period when the planets around most of the suns were inhabited and formed an interstellar council called "The Council of Suns." To keep order in the galaxy and enforce its edicts the council's tool was *The Interstellar Patrol*. The problem of many ships disappearing near a dark nebula is the first one solved by the patrol. *Galactic Patrol* by Edward E. Smith, Ph. D., a similar concept, would not appear until the September, 1937, ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION. After that, there would be many such cosmic agencies.

But most of the readers of AMAZING STORIES were scarcely aware of the scope of Hamilton's contributions to SF. The truth is that the majority of ideas innovated by Hamilton were not directly copied from him at all, but *rediscovered* at a later date by other authors. Issues of the early WEIRD TALES containing his stories are so few and so rare, that only a handful of people own them and few of those have

made a study of the origin of science fiction ideas.

A second reason was the repetitious plot structure in Hamilton's early stories. The framework of each story was very nearly the same. A menace threatens the world (or the universe) and is thwarted unilaterally by a single man. To this drawback was added a sprinkling of major scientific faults, frequently so glaring as to all-but-negate believability. Typical of these scientific sins of omission was the questionable premise in *Across Space* that Mars could be pulled to the very edge of the earth's atmospheric envelope and left dangling there while Martians flew down to the surface; or, even worse, the complete disregard for distances and time factors in the Interstellar Patrol series, where ships zipped past star systems thousands of light years apart in only hours, with no explanations.

CHARACTERIZATION of individuals was virtually nonexistent and dialogue was frequently juvenile. Despite these considerable faults, Hamilton had, even then, imaginative vitality and narrative ability of considerable power. A Stapeldonian thoroughness in delineating the history, culture and philosophy of his aliens was not completely appreciated by the

reader who was distracted by the vividness and swiftness of unfolding events. It was the extraordinary variety of his locales and the striking originality of his secondary themes that gave him popularity even while readers implied a note of criticism in giving him the affectionate pen name "World Saver."

When he began doing novels for AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY and AMAZING STORIES, he did not vary the formula that had enjoyed so much success in WEIRD TALES. In *Locked Worlds* (AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, Spring, 1929) he saved earth from the menace of the spider men, inhabitants of a simultaneous world made possible by its electrons moving in the opposite direction from earth's; *The Other Side of the Moon* (AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, Fall, 1929) found the turtle men of the moon thwarted of their evil design to conquer the earth; *The Universe Wreckers*, a three-part novel beginning in AMAZING STORIES for May, 1930, a marvelously enthralling and infinitely detailed account of the metal-roofed planet of Neptune, merely cloaked the defeat of a plan to split the sun and destroy the earth.

No story of this type was ever rejected by anyone, but Hamilton, almost hopelessly typed, could bide the stigma no longer. In a declaration of independence,

he wrote *The Man Who Saw the Future* (AMAZING STORIES, Oct., 1930). It is a tale of a 15th century apothecary transferred to the twentieth century with the accompaniment of a clap of thunder, who is sentenced to death as a sorcerer when he returns and relates the marvels he has seen. His relation of the wonders of our times, told in the figures of speech of the Middle Ages, remains memorable in its effective simplicity.

Somewhat earlier in AIR WONDER STORIES Hamilton was to present another of his groundbreaking ideas in *Cities in the Air*. Though the concept of a floating aerial city had been used as early as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Hamilton's awesome rhetorical spectacle of ranks of mighty cities wheeling through the air to join in stupendous conflict may well have inspired James Blish's "spindizzy's" in his popular series of the footloose space okies.

HAMILTON did not live all of his adventures vicariously. Through correspondent Jerome Siegal he had begun an exchange of letters with Jack Williamson. The two decided to sail down the Mississippi River in the manner of Huckleberry Finn, agreeing to meet in Minneapolis the first week in June, 1931, to inaugurate the trip.

In Minneapolis, Hamilton and Williamson bought a 14-foot skiff, two outboard motors and a camping outfit. Armed with nautical ignorance, they sailed forth to conquer the Mississippi. A fantastic summer of blunder, near-danger, exploration and fun was spent until even the emergency engine sputtered its choking last cough and they completed the trip to New Orleans aboard the only remaining stern-wheel steamer still operating on the river. In the autumn of 1933, Williamson and Hamilton hied off to Florida, ending up as beachcombers.

Those years of good times together were also the years in which Hamilton's powers as a writer matured. Evolution was a recurrent theme in his stories and he hit the jackpot in *The Man Who Evolved* (WONDER STORIES, April, 1931), wherein the pace of natural change is artificially stepped up by a machine moving a scientist from level to level, eventually transforming him into a tremendous brain feeding itself on pure energy and capable of moving interdimensionally. Still prodded by curiosity, the brain commands that the experiment progress. The result: protoplasm. Evolution proves to be circulatory.

The theme of A. Conan Doyle's famed novelet *When the World Screamed*—that this planet is a

living entity capable of physical feeling—is converted into vivid symbolism by Hamilton's handling in *The Earth Brain* (WEIRD TALES, April, 1932), wherein a man who has tracked the intelligence center of the globe to the North Pole flaunts it, only to be forced to flee perpetually for his life as tremors and quakes reveal each new hiding place and threaten destruction of the entire community unless he leaves. While wintering in Key West with Jack Williamson in 1933, he pounded out *What's It Like Out There?* which stressed man's weaknesses, the seamy heart-break, the pettiness and political expediency which might be part of the first expedition to Mars. Editors recoiled in horror at Hamilton's approach and the story remained buried in his trunk for nearly 20 years. Then, at the urging of his wife, he dusted it off and sent it into THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Editor Samuel Mines waxed poetic about "the new Edmond Hamilton who rose phoenix-like from the ashes of Captain Future." The story was acclaimed a modern masterpiece and it was said: "Now science fiction has grown up. And so has Edmond Hamilton."

So Hamilton was no longer the "world saver," even in the early thirties, when he was using themes far in advance of his

time. *The Island of Unreason* (WONDER STORIES, May, 1933), deservedly won the Jules Verne Prize Award for the best story of the calendar year 1933, as *A Conquest of Two Worlds* had harvested a similar award as the best science fiction novelet of 1932. In that story, a future American society has an island to which it sentences all anti-social men and women so they can experience the problems of life and survival where no law and order exists. The sociological and psychological implications of the story make it a milestone in the growth of the literature.

TO supplement his science fiction writing income, Edmond Hamilton tried his hand at detective stories, selling his first to Street & Smith's *Detective Story Magazine* in 1932, then the field leader. The same year he introduced the mystery element into *The Space-Rocket Murders* (AMAZING STORIES, Oct., 1932), farsightedly using Braun as the name of the leading German rocket scientist, conducting liquid hydrogen fuel experiments in Berlin. Braun is merely one of eleven savants in this area of research who is mysteriously murdered. The culprits prove to be Venusians disguised as earthmen who have achieved controlled atom power to project

their rockets across space.

No Hamilton story through 1932 had any love interest whatsoever. Extremely few even mentioned women. He was frequently quoted as cynically against marriage. Perhaps the preponderance of sisters who outvoted him in his youth had jaundiced him a bit on the institution. His mother's favorite quip whenever a man of the town got married to the effect—"Ah, he'll get his wings clipped now," may have reinforced his determination to remain single. But it also gave him the idea for *He That Hath Wings* (WEIRD TALES, July, 1938). A child born of parents seriously affected by radiation develops wings. When he grows to maturity, the only terms under which the girl he loves will agree to marry him is if he has his wings surgically removed. He does so and they appear to be happy. Soon a child is on the way but he notes that his wings have begun to grow back. Shortly after the birth of the child he is determined to have his new wings removed but succumbs to the desire of feeling the exhilaration of flying one last time. Airborne, he compulsively starts south, even though the long unused pinions are rapidly tiring. Over the water his strength gives out and he finds himself "glad to be falling as all they with wings must finally fall,

after a brief lifetime of wild, sweet flight, dropping contentedly to rest."

Romance and marriage eventually was approached via many delays and detours. By prearrangement Hamilton met Jack Williamson in Los Angeles in 1940. Julius Schwartz, Hamilton's agent since 1934, was also in town with Mort Weisinger, then editing THRILLING WONDER STORIES, STARTLING STORIES, CAPTAIN FUTURE and STRANGE STORIES, to all of which Hamilton was a regular contributor. They introduced him to Leigh Brackett, a young lady who had joined the fraternity of science fiction authors only that year with *Martian Quest* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Feb., 1940). The two had a number of things in common. There were Indian strains of the Mohawk and Sioux in the Brackett blood line. She, too, had read Edgar Rice Burroughs avidly as early as the age of seven. But the prospect of entry into the armed services distracted Hamilton from any immediate thought of matrimony. Beyond that, his literary career had taken an unexpected turn, destined to put off almost indefinitely the creation of new image for him as a quality writer of science fiction.

It came about this way. While attending The First World Science Fiction Convention in New

York City, Leo Margulies, editorial director of Standard Magazines, after listening to the proceedings for a few hours let go his now famous quote; "I didn't think you fans could be so damn sincere." He followed it with action, plotting on the spot a new science fiction magazine. This magazine was to be called CAPTAIN FUTURE, a pulp aimed at the lower teen-agers and featuring a novel about the same character each issue. There must be a super-scientist hero. There must also be aides: a robot and an android and, of course, a beautiful female assistant. Each story must be a crusade to bring to justice an arch villain; and, in each novel, the hero must be captured and escape three times. CAPTAIN FUTURE was the purest distillation of standard science fiction gimmicks brought to bear on a single-character magazine.

Hamilton was asked to do the series. All but three of 21 novels and novelets were done by Hamilton to a hard and fast formula. During a renaissance period when a new type of science fiction was coming into vogue and creating reputations for Heinlein, van Vogt, Sturgeon and Asimov, Hamilton was labeled as a specialist in blood-and-thunder juveniles.

HAMILTON returned to California the summer of 1946.

Leigh Brackett and Ray Bradbury provided a welcoming committee. Hamilton and Brackett were married in San Gabriel, Calif. on Dec. 31, 1946. Among their close friends were C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner, another famed marriage of science fiction personalities. They motored back east with the Kuttners' in 1949, "debarking" at Kinsman, Ohio, where Hamilton had some relatives. There they became enchanted with a 120-year-old farmhouse set on 35 acres, and made it their permanent home.

Time now was divided between their retreat and Hollywood, where Leigh Brackett did a great deal of screen and TV writing. Then Hamilton got surprisingly favorable reviews for hard-cover reprint publication of *The Star Kings* (1949) and *City at the World's End* (1951). They were dismissed as freaks by hard-core scientifictionists who could not disengage their thinking from Captain Future when thinking of Hamilton. As one result, the invitations to Hamilton and Brack-

ett to appear as guests of honor of the Metropolitan Science Fiction Conference in New York in 1954 was extended more out of affection than as a token of literary achievement. But there is every indication that the reverse is true in the new offer that they be the guests of honor at the 1964 World Science Fiction Convention scheduled for San Francisco.

Hamilton's role in feeding fresh variants continuously into the developing body of science fiction for more than a third of a century must now be considered a major element in the shaping of modern science fiction. That a portion of his literary production is steadfastly refusing to divest itself of entertainment value and thought appeal for new generations of readers is becoming apparent. These elements together with the mounting calibre of his current production bring closer the day when he will be better known as "the dean of science fiction," than as the mentor of Captain Future.

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By
ROGER
ZELAZNY

The Misfit

*He didn't like the army. He didn't want to
be a doctor with a beautiful nurse. He didn't
want to kill all the aliens singlehanded.
What was with him anyway?*

JACKSON returned the General's stare.

"I will *not* stand at attention, and you can go to hell!"

The General beetled his brows.

"What is it with you?"

"I want out of this chicken outfit."

"I told you last week that I'd approve your transfer."

"That's not what I mean."

"What then?"

"I am not Colonel Jackson and you are not General Paine. This place only exists in my mind, and I want to change my mind."

The General sighed.

"Okay, Jackson, that's your privilege. What'll it be this time? The Navy?"

"I want out from the whole military—like a civilian, like something enjoyable."

"Name it."

Doctor Jackson tore off his rubber gloves and flung them into the corner. Miss Mayor, amazing despite starch, came up behind him and wrapped wonderful arms about his chest. She pressed her cheek to his neck.

"You're famous already, Jack. Forty-four brain operations in a month—all of them delicate and complicated—and all successful! What a record you've achieved—"

"Okay! Okay!"

"What's the matter, Jackie? Have I done something?"

"No!"

"Then why are you hollering? Oh, I should have realized—you're tired, on edge. After an operation like that last one, anybody—"

"I am *not* tired!"

"You *must* be!"

"How can I be tired without having done anything?"

"I don't understand you . . ."

"The hell you don't!"

"I don't like Jackie when he uses naughty words."

"Then step over to that corner and turn into a table," he pointed, "with a bowl of chrysanthemums on it."

"What do you mean?"

She moved around him and stared up into his eyes. All at once she was the loveliest, most desirable woman in creation.

"What's it with you, anyhow?" she asked.

He bit his lip.

"With a bowl of chrysanthemums," he repeated.

"Are you certain?" she sighed.

He nodded.

THE rocket dropped to the rainbow desert like a red-stemmed flower growing backward to seed. Shortly the red vanished and the steel pod lay upon Jackson Plains. Professor Jackson strode out onto Jackson's World and sniffed the smoke-blue, November-cold air. He studied the unit he carried, then spoke into the microphone at his throat.

"It's all right. You can come out."

His three companions, tanned despite the long voyage, lean, tall and grinning, strode through the hatchway and looked about,

all recklessness and competency.

"By golly, you were right, Doc! It *is* habitable!"

"Of course it is. Jackson is never wrong."

Jackson nodded in a perfunctory manner and proceeded to orient the photomap.

"The ruins are that way," he pointed.

They swung into step beside him.

Something was gnawing within his mind, tingling at the base of his skull.

Half an hour, it seemed. They paused beside a hedge of jagged monoliths.

"This is a mighty weird place," Mason was drawling, Tennessee-ish.

A ululating cry from above and Mason collapsed, spitting blood. The spear had passed entirely through him, hurled with enormous force. Jackson threw himself flat.

Thompson screamed and coughed once, moistly.

Blaster in hand, Jackson glanced at Wolf.

"Did you get a look at what did it?"

"Yeah," whispered the man. "Wish I hadn't. It was horrible—all those arms, that green skin, those bug eyes—"

Thompson emptied his lungs for the last time.

Another banshee cry, nearer. Jackson wormed his way to the

right, then he waited quietly.

The faintest of ticks, metal kissing stone . . .

He sprang to his feet, triggering a bolt of flame.

The thing fell, slavering. A greenish ichor dripped from the great hole his shot had torn in its midsection.

. . . And something in the back of his head was tingling.

"Doc, there's more of 'em!"

He heard the crackle of Wolf's blaster, the sizzle of frying flesh. Two of the creatures fell.

Four more were sliding down the slope toward him.

He turned and shot Wolf. Then he tossed his blaster over his shoulder.

"Go ahead," he called, "I'm anxious to see how you squirm out of this one."

The aliens were almost upon him when a great hissing shape reared from behind a rock and slithered in their direction. They halted, uttering brief cries, then turned and retreated back up the hill.

He followed.

"Pretty good," he told the huge snake. "Passable, anyhow."

It dropped to near his height, peering at him.

"I'm tired of suspending disbelief," he told it.

The snake seemed to sigh.

"I'm curious whether I could die from one of these," said Jackson.

"It is physiologically possible," answered the snake, "but it is forbidden. What is it with you, anyhow?"

"Couldn't you just let me wake up?"

"No."

"Why not? I would like to know why I'm here."

"Such memories do not exist. You will never know. It had to be that way."

"And I will dream forever?"

"For the rest of your life."

"Was it the population problem?—The other planets uninhabitable, interstellar travel impossible, and people stacked like cordwood in glass coffins?"

"I couldn't say."

"And you are the machine, talking through an electrode in my skull, feeding me, programming my wish-fulfillments?"

"If you want it that way."

"I don't. Am I in a coma? Did I have an accident? Is this some kind of drug therapy?"

"Call it anything you want."

"When will I wake up?"

"You are awake."

"You have to say that. Whatever sort of machine you are, that's the way you're programmed."

"Then why ask?"

He looked about for the blaster. It was gone.

Suddenly, it was in his hand.

"If you want to kill the snake, go ahead."

Quickly, he turned it toward his own head. It vanished.

"You can't."

His hands fell to his sides.

"Could this be hell?"

"If you wish."

"*Can't* I wake up?"

"Are you certain that's what you want? There *are* certain provisions."

"I want to try it."

"So be it."

THE transparent lid of the case had slid open above him. His muscles were spaghetti and his throat was dry and his left arm was porcupined with syrettes. After a long while he managed to withdraw their bright points. Keeping his arm tightly bent, the lesions stayed under direct pressure. With his right hand he reached behind his head. He felt an electrode taped to his shaven skull.

As he moved to draw it away a voice rang in his head:

"If you are disappointed with reality, come lie down again—replace the needles, replace the contact."

"I won't," he muttered, tearing it loose.

He struggled to his feet and went in search of anybody.

* * *

It had been the only way to solve the population problem, said Mannerung. Put everyone to sleep, awaken key scientists at

different times, to work on interstellar flight, maintain a skeleton crew to service the Regulator. Let the fifty billion sleepers dream under glass—they're better off than they could ever be awake.

"It takes a peculiar sort," the Doctor had told him, "to prefer the mundane to the extraordinary, the humdrum to the satisfaction of his desires. Provisions had to be made for such people, of course. If a dreamer is sufficiently disturbed, the Regulator will permit him to awaken. We can always find something for him to do. There is much minor drudgery to the maintenance of the machinery. If that's what you want, you're elected. You can start by replacing some tubes in this subsection unit."

He passed him a chart.

"Here's the diagram. They're all numbered. The ones circled in red need to be replaced. When you're finished with that, you can start straightening out that storeroom." He pointed. "It's a mess. You're sure this is what you want?"

"Yes," said Jackson, "the other way was—well, parasitism. It was too good, and too useless."

"Okay then, get to it."

Humming happily, he went off after the tubes.

Finally knowing what it was with Jackson, the Mannerung-figure did not sigh. **THE END**



THE SPECTROSCOPE

By S. E. COTTS

The Fools of Time By William E. Barrett. 309 pp. Doubleday & Co., Inc. \$4.50.

The pivotal idea of this novel is one with potential, even though it has been somewhat overworked. But then, author Barrett, in tying this idea firmly to another (A cannot work unless there is B), blunts the edge of the first one and reduces its impact considerably. Set in our time, the book deals with the discovery by the Russians of a serum which arrests the aging process in humans. It seems as if man's life-long dream has finally come to pass. Naturally, the reaction in the United States is of such proportions that the dismay following the orbiting of the first Russian Sputnik was a "tempest in a teapot" by comparison. An immortality serum in Russian hands would certainly be the ultimate weapon in any ideological dispute. But on the heels of this event the United

States discovers something the Russians have not revealed—namely, that one of the components of this serum comes from the blood of cancer victims, and that its invention came only as a by-product of research to eradicate cancer. And when that dread disease can be prevented, the raw materials for the youth serum won't exist either.

It appears to me that there are a good many things wrong with trying to tie these two issues together—the hope of youth tied to the pain of cancer. First of all, it seems overly melodramatic. The discovery of the serum is striking enough without making it even flashier. Secondly, it is very weak scientifically. Our present-day science has already succeeded in causing cancer tumors in animals for purposes of medical research. It is hard to believe, therefore, that a scientist who could manage to produce a youth serum at all

could not also find a way to do so from the blood of animal cancer victims instead of human ones. Or, failing that, the analysis and production of such a substance synthetically would not appear too far fetched. Thirdly, the tying together of the good and the bad, youth serum and cancer victims, turns out, in Mr. Barrett's treatment, to be a chance to indulge in much thinly disguised propaganda and flag-waving for the democratic and (by implication) ethical way of life. In this respect, I am reminded of some of Robert Heinlein's recent sermons in the form of novels, though to give credit to both where due, Barrett is not as obvious as Heinlein, but Heinlein would probably have supplied a much stronger scientific base than Barrett.

But Mr. Barrett's book contains a further flaw, the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. Just at the point where the reader might come to accept the two sides of the coin that are youth and cancer, the author backs away from the problem completely by having the United States discover the formula to be still far from foolproof. As the book ends, the U.S. will not be clearing the serum for release in the foreseeable future, and even Russia won't have enough cancer victims to supply serum for more than a very few leaders.

The U.S. will begin cracking down on bootleg serum, while conducting a mammoth campaign on all media to show that our government wouldn't dream of playing politics with the life and health of her citizens (except maybe raising the safe standards on the amount of strontium-90 permissible in our food, indulging in brinkmanship with the proliferation of atomic weapons, or playing gambling games with the labeling and use of pesticides, etc.?). And the serum's value to Russia will also have diminished greatly, since it has been unmasked for the promising but imperfect tool it really is. Certainly this is a safe, sane and civilized way to end the book, but not a very exciting or climactic one, and one which completely avoids the head-on confrontation of two giants which seemed inescapable when Mr. Barrett first introduced the situation.

Chief members of the cast who try to help Mr. Barrett along with his plot are George Donlin, a newspaper editor in Denver, Colorado, who gets to break the kind of story that is every newsman's dream, and David Gerson, the American doctor whose discovery of the serum was stolen by an associate who took it to Russia. Also hanging about the stage are Donlin's weepy wife, Morna, and his two

rather impossible children. The subordinate plot which involves Donlin's personal life is unfortunately no more successful than the various major story strands. It is just one more element in a book which is pulled in too many directions.

The Coming of the Robots *Edited by Sam Moskowitz. 254 pp. Collier Books. Paper: 95¢.*

This anthology of ten robot stories is a pleasure on all counts, excepting only the cover illustration. In general layout it is head and shoulders above the products of the other paperback publishers. It features an extremely sturdy cover with a binding obviously sewn to stay, plus print much larger than the average and enough space between the lines to make it easy on the eyes. Mr. Moskowitz has furnished an excellent introduction, which traces the history of robots both as mechanical devices and science fiction characters. In a brief space, he manages a surprisingly complete rundown of the types of robot plots most commonly encountered—robots who are dangerous to man, those who are a help to man, those who run the world, those who want to be human, etc. As an extra bonus, Mr. Moskowitz introduces each story with a bit about the author, which could serve as a model of its type for

giving succinct information without wisecracks.

It is in the choice of stories, though, that the major gift to the reader lies. Probably no one, not even Mr. Moskowitz, has kept track of exactly how many robot stories have ever been written, but certainly the number is astronomical enough to mean that this anthology is the result of some very tasteful winnowing. There is no bad story in the group. Perhaps Raymond Z. Gallun's "Derelict," the story of a marvelous snake-like robot in an abandoned space ship is not as original as the others, but its weakness is a relative matter here. In fact, considering that seven of the ten stories date from the 1930's, it is a wonder that their prose style is so much to the point. A great deal of sf from that period is a victim of its own topheavy verbiage, but these are very direct.

One of the trends Mr. Moskowitz illustrates in his selection is the change that occurred in the presentation of robots—from the time-honored Frankenstein type of robot who turns on mankind, to the robot who helps or takes on many of the characteristics of mankind. How caught up with human attributes these robots become is demonstrated by the fact that in four of the stories, the reader will find robots as suicides. One

sample of this is Eando Binder's famous "I, Robot." In it, Adam Link, the robot, doesn't understand why people fear him until he finds a copy of *Frankenstein*, after which he kills himself. Again, in "Helen O'Loy," by Lester Del Rey, a female robot kills herself so she can be with the man she loves, and whom she has naturally outlived. The third sad suicide is that of a lonesome Martian robot in "The Last Machine," by John Wyndham. He is stranded on Earth and he takes his life after discovering that he cannot communicate with what he considers the primitive people here. In the fourth case, "Rex," by Harl Vincent, a robot takes cells from the seat of emotion in a human and implants them within himself in an effort to perfect himself further. Thinking he has failed, he kills himself in the throes of those all-too-human emotions — rage and despair.

It is unfortunate that three of these four stories come one right after the other at the beginning of the book. A more balanced arrangement is desirable.

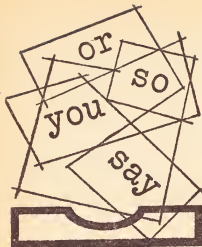
One of the landmarks in the anthology is "Runaround," by Isaac Asimov. This is the story in which he first expounded his Three Laws of Robotics. Though not great Asimov as far as literature goes it has an importance that transcends its literary qual-

ity. Asimov's Three Laws have become the axioms for countless other sf stories to such an extent that often they are not even restated. Certainly this is the highest possible compliment for Asimov, the inventor, even if not for Asimov, the author.

Two stories are in a lighter vein. Michael Fischer's "Misfit" is the tale of a robot who is a playboy first and above all, and a robot only secondarily. The other light touch is supplied by a man who is a master of it, Clifford Simak. In "Earth for Inspiration," he recounts what happens when an ex-successful science fiction writer comes in contact with some of his fans who have decided to turn his fiction into fact.

My choice for the best single work would be "Lost Memory," by Peter Phillips, an English author. His story about a colony of robots who have no memory of man and what happens when they unwittingly and unknowingly come in contact with one is as poignant as most works which have completely human casts of characters.

Those who enjoy this sample of Mr. Moskowitz's anthologizing talents will also want to investigate his companion volume, *Exploring Other Worlds*—same size, price, and format, and almost as good.



Dear Editor:

Science fiction has a far more wide and varied readership, I believe, than the uninitiate would credit it with. Everyone knows or guesses that a large part of the readers are kids fascinated by space or bug-eyed-monsters; but many are unaware of the frustrated housewives or clerks who find escape and wide horizons through it; of the aerospace technicians with agile minds who delight in it; of the serious students of socio-politics and related subjects who find good thought in it.

I fear that in my case there is an addiction . . . if, however, I do read it for pure escape, I have the deal beautifully rationalized. And I am sure that many more serious intellectuals than

myself share some of my views. That is, I feel that science fiction is the one field in which one can find, in short story form, acute criticism of modern society and fascinating speculation on the true nature of things. There is also to be found in the field some good writing . . . sometimes a good, tight yarn; some good plotting; some good characterization . . . and so on.

However, after completing your July issue, I think that if you had the grace to know shame you would remove that ridiculous boast from your masthead. . . . "First in science fiction since 1926" indeed! Maybe you have slipped through one of your ridiculous time leaks and are still in 1926. I ran down the list of stories to check my negative reaction:

Item: "Redemption." A story with some possibilities, but even if you discount the basic weakness (the you-are-your-own-grandfather bit has been pretty much worked to death for an idea which was a clever trick once or twice) the problem remains that the story was too short to fully develop the good twists it did have . . . or rather, socio-religious setup and character.

Item: "The Game." Speculation on how alien alienness might be? A reminder not to take for granted that Aliens we

may meet are do-gooders? Okay . . . acceptable from that viewpoint. Horrible, though.

Item: "The Programmed People." Disappointing. Jack Sharkey seems to have a tendency to start strong, finish weak. After starting a yarn that had elements that held the attention, he really wandered off on a vector or something. The whole story seemed to be about the hive and the people in it. . . . I wanted some far more satisfying development of the future in the terms of the lives of the people with whom we became entangled than the statement that the key to their salvation was, in pieces, in their hands, and then a full page color description of how Bodger was a Bomb. In fact, he may have blown the Brain to Bits and our poor little folks up above are in a mess! We don't even know. I think that outside of the classic "Lady or the Tiger" story, no one who pretends to be an author has the right to be so lazy and work that old trick.

As a matter of fact, I imagine Sharkey must get advances on the strength of his beginnings, and then rattle off endings . . . which, deplorably, show it.

Item: "The Formula." O. Henry indeed! Another phony.

Item: "The Yes Men of Venus." Oh, dear. If this satire had had a different setting, it might

have looked real good. . . . I did chuckle quite a bit. But just when I was settling back for a good series of laughs and a mad yarn, the damned thing ended with another cheap trick.

So I said to myself, now why did I buy this magazine? I bought it before, I think, and didn't feel it was this bad. I looked on the shelf and found the May and June issues and, sure enough, the previous issues did not give the impression that AMAZING was pitched to a readership which adores pessimism or being made an ass of . . .

I feel you owe it to your readers to try to achieve some balance in the tone of the stories printed. If you are going to specialize in downbeat doom and cheap tricks, okay, keep it that way, and your readers will be happy if that's what they read you for. But if you're going to give us things like "Jobo" or Ben Bova's article in the May issue, or "Telempathy" or the *beginning* of The "Programmed People" in June, then have the mercy not to come out with something like the July issue.

Katheryn Avila
5930 De Lay Avenue
Glendora, California

PS. As a matter of fact, just after I'd gotten to the point where I believed that bit about the high cost of everything, I have now the deep suspicion that

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● *Wow! We haven't had a good tongue-lashing like that in a long time. Shook us right out of our feckless ease. No doubt it all goes to prove that you can't please all the people all the time. We're planning, next time, to have Sharkey write just Part I of his next serial.*

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

On reading the next-month notes in the June issue, and the cover blurb on the July issue, I was skeptical of the value of "Redemption." I am no longer.

I think you're right that we readers won't forget this one. All I can say is that the story is successful—no other compliment would do it justice.

Robert F. Young deserves some kind of award—and so does **AMAZING**.

Norman M. Davis
4915 Chevy Chase Blvd.
Chevy Chase 15, Md.

● *Well, so far he has the Davis Award.*

Dear Editor:

I have often heard that fantasy moves in cycles of popularity. I don't know whether this is true or not. Perhaps, at the present time, fans just don't have anything to be excited about in the first place. There's another possible explanation—that readers have lost their imaginations, their dreams. Maybe that's not so hard to do in this world of ours. I should hate to believe it.

A little allegory. There is a scene in the movie, *The Thief of Baghdad*, in which Abu has come to a mysterious, nether-worldly plane on which are many white tents. He walks into one. In it are seven or eight old men with flowing white beards. They have been like stone for six thousand years, and only returned to life when Abu entered. The Old Man tells Abu that they are the remnants of that Golden Age when man walked the earth like a god and nothing was impossible to him because he *believed*. Only when such a person comes among them can they return to life.

That isn't the situation today, is it? There are people like that nowadays, aren't there? I hope so.

Paul A. Scaramazza
1615 West Street
Union City, New Jersey

● *Believed* what?

... OR SO YOU SAY

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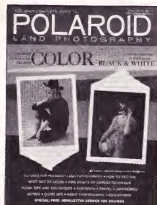
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